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Screen

Mario Cannella: Neo-Realist Criticism
Christopher Williams: Andre Bazin and Neo-Realism
Interviews with Roberto Rossellini
Rossellini on Rossellini



Romance and the Cinema

by JOHN KOBAL

Introduction by Deborah Kerr

It is not life but the imitation of life, the 'once upon a time' that produces romance in the movies. In this book, John Kobal traces the Romantic Cinema and the stars who made it, the romantic stars who had a style, whatever or whoever produced it, that was uniquely their own.

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Adventure and the Cinema

by IAN CAMERON

Introduction by Douglas Fairbanks Jr

Adventure is so much a part of the cinema that any attempt to define adventure movies in terms of a genre would inevitably be unsatisfactory. Instead, Ian Cameron, editor of *Movie*, in his own words 'tried to use the concept of Date Peg on which to hang an entire book of illustrations about the cinema'.

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Studio

By printing some interviews with and an article by Roberto Rossellini in this issue we are continuing the policy (begun with the special issue on Douglas Sirk — *Screen Summer 1971*) of focussing attention on film makers whose work poses substantial issues for film criticism.

Rossellini has been at the centre of three important events in the history of the cinema over the past thirty years: he was one of the film makers most responsible for the creation of neo-realism in Italy in the 1940's; both through his films and by direct personal encouragement he helped make the New Wave in France in the late 1950's a possibility; and his engagement with television in the 1960's has been more serious than that of any other established film maker.

These involvements have all been fruitful and have made Rossellini's films continuously provocative. Questions have been raised about cinematic realism, narrative structure, the relationship between fictional and documentary techniques; how the cinema can be used for the dramatisation and exposition of ideas; what new possibilities are opened up for a film maker by the different practices and structure of television.

Christopher Williams's discussion of Andre Bazin's critical encounter with neo-realism indicates some of the intellectual interest that Rossellini's work has generated. Sadly, little of this interest has penetrated British film culture. Generally, the work has been denigrated or ignored — such a response reveals more about our film culture than it does about Rossellini's films.

In the 1940's critical reaction was ambivalent. Grierson documentary critics, noting the documentary approach and social concern that were prominent elements in *Roma, città aperta* and *Paisà* were sympathetic. *Sequence* critics like Lindsay Anderson or Lotte Eisner concentrated on the aesthetic 'roughness' and melodramatic qualities of these films (and of *Germania, anno zero*) and were hostile. With the advantage of hindsight it is easy to see that both these reactions were partial and distorting but at least the need to discuss Rossellini's work was admitted.

In the late 1950's and early 1960's when Rossellini's influence on the New Wave generally and on Godard particularly became evident a revaluation of his work was obvious and necessary. Instead a blocking operation took place; the films weren't shown and they weren't written about. This blocking is one of the strongest marks of the narrow range of interest and lack of intellectual curiosity of the established film culture. It is the more objectionable in that almost all the manifestations of the New Wave were uncritically accepted within that culture.

However, Rossellini's work (aided by the emergence of a non-established film culture) was powerful enough to evade the blocking to some extent. In the past ten years, Rossellini has existed marginally within our film culture; some of his films have been shown at the National Film Theatre (usually hidden away in other seasons) or on television; occasional articles have appeared in magazines like *Movie*, *New Left Review* and *Monogram*.

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Although we are conscious of its limitations, we hope that the material in this issue will help to make this existence less marginal. We wanted to include our own critical assessment of Rossellini's achievement but the unavailability of key films and the lack of opportunity for systematic viewing of his oeuvre made this impossible. We are negotiating for a Rossellini season at the National Film Theatre — part of the reason for presenting this material now is to emphasise the need for such a season and for key films like *Europa '51*, *Viaggio in Italia*, *Viva l'Italia*, *Atti degli apostoli* and *Socrate* to be made generally available.

With Mario Cannella's article on neo-realism we resume our effort 'to situate the making of films within specific societies, at certain historical moments, within particular economic formations' (see *Screen* v 13, n 4, Winter 1972/3, especially Goffredo Fofi's article). Cannella's thesis, that neo-realism has to be understood through its dependence on the ideology of the anti-fascist front, raises a crucial question when related to the Rossellini material. In both the interviews and the article Rossellini expresses the liberal, humanist ideology that Cannella criticises as being responsible for the weaknesses and limitations of both the anti-fascist front and neo-realism. From this perspective Rossellini's work might be seen as open to strong objections. But before objections of this kind could be made, the issue of how far a film maker's ideology is transposed directly and unchanged into a film he makes would have to be resolved. Andre Bazin touched on this area when, as Christopher Williams shows, he claimed Rossellini for the ideology of liberal humanism but also noted formal characteristics of the films that seemed 'to get in the way' of the expression of that ideology.

To explore the area properly, problems raised in the last two issues of *Screen* would have to be taken into account. If codes exist in the cinema do they prevent a film maker from expressing himself in a direct way; is it defensible to conceptualise the making of a film as the act of an individual expressing himself; do codes carry their own ideology which the film maker has to accept if he employs the codes? Such questions are outside the limits Mario Cannella set for himself in writing his article but central for *Screen*.

FRANK TASHLIN

**editors: Claire Johnston
Paul Willemen**

Screen and the Edinburgh Film Festival present this important study of the work of Frank Tashlin – a series of original and already published essays by younger critics here and abroad.

The study includes two interviews with Tashlin, one by Peter Bogdanovich, and contributions from Robert Mundy, Roger Tailleur, Louis Seguin, Ian Cameron, J-L Comolli, J Narboni and Paul Willemen. The book is very well illustrated and includes drawings from Tashlin's cartoon books.

The *Frank Tashlin* book is published at £1.10 or \$3.25 and is available from *Screen*, 63 Old Compton Street, London W1V 5PN.

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Mario Cannella

Preface

I feel I should preface this work – completed about a year ago – with a few words, as it has at least two separate aims. In the first place, it can be seen as an attempt to re-examine neo-realist criticism, with the aim of clearing away a series of misunderstandings and indicating a few fundamental lines for analysis which might lead us to a deeper understanding; in the second place it can be seen as a series of propositions aimed at that sector of Italian culture which is trying to contribute to the qualitative transformation of reality in a socialist direction, suggesting a way out of its current crisis. While on the first point I have nothing to add, as for the second, I must point out that this subject is again up for discussion as part of the debate on cultural activity and political mediation (praxis) which seems to me to be of crucial importance.

* * *

For some time now discussion on the crisis of Italian film criticism has become more insistent, and the debates and clashes more frequent – this being, it is felt, a sign of vitality, and hence something positive. All the same, if we go back to the discussions and polemics that raged ten years or so ago – for example, those on '*revisione critica*', on the '*specifico filmico*', on *Senso* and realism, etc – we should rediscover in them a level of heated debate, a desire for *rinnovamento* (renewal), a drive to unearth basic causes, which – apart from any judgment we might make on the merits of the debates – today seems to be quite lacking. On the contrary; if we wanted to choose a term that would encompass the contemporary situation, we could do no better than to speak of 'weariness' ie exhaustion and disintegration. It almost seems that our criticism of the cinema lives from day to day; that it has reached the stage where the analysis of a film – which may be more or less acute, more or less serious – has become fundamentally empiricist: there is a total absence of the organic links which are needed to set our opinion of an individual film in a more general cultural problematic – to root it, that is, in a precise ideology. On such weak efforts the ideological influence of neo-capitalism can make itself felt more and more, with its tendency to reduce every analysis and cultural activity, on the one hand, to studies which are as 'scientific' and 'positivistic' as possible, and in which technique and specialisation acquire value only 'within the limits' of the subject under discussion, thus obscuring – negating – the general

6 'meaning' or 'value' of the studies; and, on the other hand, to propositions which appeal to the universality of values and the objectivity of culture, and bear a predominantly 'humanistic' stamp. Such propositions are deemed to have no practical value or 'function' and thus can be (and have been) easily integrated. Our criticism of the cinema seems to swing between our inability to conceive of new ideological tendencies, and our implicit consciousness that the old explanations are no longer sufficient. Such stagnation and disintegration touches more than just the world of criticism, but derives from something more complex: the profound crisis in the spiritual strength (and practical activity) of the political culture (or simply, the politics) of the Italian workers' movement in relation to neo-capitalism. However in this essay we are concerned principally with the cinema; and in this connection we can distinguish two ways of confronting the crisis. One¹ takes the point of view of the traditional critic, the specialist, who moans about the current difficulties, makes no effort to explain their origins, as this would be too 'theoretical' or 'cultural', and falls back on a kind of mystic faith in his profession. The other chooses the road of rigorous analysis: it re-examines all its assumptions and their ability to have a positive effect on everyday social and cultural activity; it defines its own goals, and chooses its priorities on the basis of a true understanding of the links existing between each specific area and that nebulous whole which is traditionally characterised as 'heteronomous'; and it is willing to run the risk as well of a 'terrifying lack of precision'² -- if this is necessary -- in order to re-establish a common destiny between critical judgment and social perspective.

Why neo-realism then? What is our purpose in focussing our inquiry on the phenomenon of neo-realism?

With a good deal of justice neo-realism has been defined as the 'golden age' of our cinema, as the summit of its achievements, and that which gave our film-makers a world-wide reputation. But these are not the only reasons for our broaching this analysis. It would seem to us, in fact, that neo-realism is the fundamental axis, the reference point, that enables us to establish: (i) the substance and formation of our film criticism, its relationship to the post-war culture, and its intellectual and practical components; (ii) the capacity or incapacity of this culture to undergo a 'qualitative' renewal in the face of the crisis in neo-realism and culture generally during the 'fifties.

This is our immediate past. It is our opinion that only by a profound reconsideration of the polemics of the period and the heritage that derives from them, only by an unprejudiced understanding that concretely historicises origins and functions, will our criticism of the cinema be able to forge the instruments it needs to actively exploit the present contradictions: 'a concrete and conclusive renewal of the arguments associated with neo-realism

could perhaps help our film criticism to mature far more than could the many evasions it has had recourse to over the past few years'.³

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I

Neo-realism and its crises marches in step with the discussions around our cinematic (and, to a lesser extent, our literary) criticism of the years 1950 to 1960. And we still experience the repercussions of the neo-realist period today, if only by comparing the 'flowering' of those years, and the 'moral commitment' of neo-realism, with the conformism and weariness of our own times. But if we wish to steer clear of moralism or simplistic 'nostalgia', we must rigorously face up to the problem of neo-realism, to the substance of its cognitive propositions, and to the causes which brought about its decline. We must not be deceived by appearances: at the Parma Symposium in 1953,⁴ critics of various tendencies found themselves in agreement on certain points – particularly on their recognition of the 'positive value of Italian neo-realism, and especially its formative influence on the fortunes of our cinema'. But what lay behind this sham unity? What were the contradictory motives underlying this facade of agreement? What we have to ask ourselves in the end is this: how has film criticism – in its various ideological tendencies – helped us to understand neo-realism? Can we say that it has in fact contributed something to the analysis of the phenomenon, explaining it in terms of its articulations and in terms of the profound links between itself and the social reality of those years?

If we go back and examine the Italian film magazines and articles concerned with neo-realism, and then back further to the very beginnings of our criticism, we are struck by the overbearing influence of idealism (in all its various forms). And we shall see below that to overcome this idealist tendency was (and to some extent still is) a central problem. As part of this general effort – dating from the post-war years – to overcome the idealist co-ordinates within the methodology of aesthetics, we might note the contribution of a few critics⁵ who appeal openly and programmatically to the teachings of Croce.^[1] What guidelines do they offer us for an understanding of neo-realism?

The point of departure on which they are all agreed is their conviction that the basic, fundamental element in a work of art is imaginative activity – ie creative *imagination*.⁶ Of course none of them deny the importance (as a component of 'intuition', or as one of the 'tools' available to the critic) of the social-historical foundation underlying the individual artistic product; nor do they deny the importance of the outstanding characteristics of the culture of which this product is an expression, nor the importance of the author's personal experience. All these elements, however, far from coinciding within an articulated dialectic with the imagin-

8 active impulse, are held to be quite distinct from it: they belong to sociology, to the 'history of culture', to economics, to psychology – *but not to aesthetics*.

Imagination thus represents an autonomous, and if not an historical, then certainly a metahistorical, impulse. Thus to speak of 'realism' in a work of art is meaningless, since art, by its nature as a creative elaboration of reality, is realist in so far as it is imaginative:

'It will thus be clear that to describe a poem as realistic does not mean that this particular work, as distinct from others, can not be thought of as an imaginative creation, but simply that it has been produced in specific objective conditions which offered the poet's imagination certain materials from reality . . . *these being materials, however*, which in their specific dimensions, *have no importance whatever for the poet*. . . . In other words, we see that the poetic concreteness of his work is determined once again by the way in which he has imaginatively recreated the reality available to him.'

Therefore, as far as aesthetics is concerned, the very concept of neo-realism is meaningless. The farthest one can go is to say that at that particular point in time, in those post-war years, the whole of reality – and in particular its 'social dimension'⁸ – was available to the imaginative reworking of the artist. And yet the most valid of the conclusions insists that:

'the term neo-realism is unfortunate. It should be borne in mind that all 'isms' are nothing more than verbal expedients, or educational constructs . . . : literary *genres* do not exist, and hence neither do cinematic *genres*. From the point of view of art, only single works can lay claim to a valid existence. One can make an aesthetic judgment on a particular film, but not on a series of films.'⁹

As far as criticism is concerned then, the only serious line of argument is that of monographic analysis, ie:

'the neo-realism of Rossellini or of Visconti, of De Sica or of Lizzani;¹⁰ indeed, the particular neo-realism (if we must persist in using this term) that can be identified as a series of correspondences scattered through the work of these and other directors.'

The gravest weakness of these positions consists, in our opinion, in their having isolated the imaginative impulse from the intellective and active dimension, in their having relegated history to the status of a mere 'environmental consideration'. Neither are any explanations forthcoming concerning the crisis that neo-realism (or rather, its practitioners) went through, other than something along the lines of a 'crisis of the imaginative faculty', in the course of which a stylistic breakthrough is repeated so many times it becomes

In order that neo-realism should succeed in producing poetry once again, the tools of its lyricism would need to be revivified, and its individual practitioners would have to believe both in themselves and in their art. They would have to lend their ears to the lifegiving breath of vocation.¹²

In conclusion we can say that the realm which this critical tendency inhabits is somewhat restricted: any help towards our understanding can come to us only via the analysis of individual works, though even at this level invalidated by the obviously fragmentary character of the context. On the other hand we are offered no aids at all for unravelling the links that run between neo-realism and the general reality that produced it, and even fewer for evaluating a contemporary neo-realist poetic tendency: such problems, within the scope of 'liberal' criticism, do not exist – and any way, what have they got to do with aesthetics?

We have taken our first steps in the criticism of neo-realism by examining the 'liberal' position, in order to pose a requirement that this line of argument neglects – and that is, that the greatest moment of Italian cinema should be closely linked to the reality of its time ie, to anti-fascism and the Resistance.^[3] Umberto Barbaro did well to warn that 'we can never fully understand the neo-realism of the Italian cinema unless we take ourselves back to the spirit and history of anti-fascism'.¹³ These days, as G Oldrini¹⁴ has capably pointed out, even the followers of Croce and the Catholics recognise this link with the Resistance – but as something 'spontaneous' in the eyes of the former, and as a 'reaction to all forms of violence and oppression' in the eyes of the latter.¹⁵

For its own part, on the other hand, all or nearly all 'left' criticism has sought to identify, between neo-realism and the Resistance (anti-fascism), a series of organic links, or articulations, which might reflect dialectically the dimension common to both. The ultimate weakness of this approach, however, is revealed in the way 'left' criticism has confronted a reality – in this case, anti-fascism – by way of considering it *in toto* in an uncritical – not historicist – and apologist way, yet at the same time using the very means of expression, or concepts, of the anti-fascist movement itself. In this sense we believe there has been no analysis, on the part of a generation of critics, of their own political and cultural formation, of the contemporary state, function and limits of a whole culture – that which emerged from the anti-fascist movement – and of its relations with the 'political' anti-fascist movement forming its substrata, and representing in a certain sense its practical dimension, ie there has been no analysis of the mediation between intellectual activity and concrete reality. Until now this 'gap' has prevented critics from classifying neo-realism according to the real (historical) effects it had, just as it has stopped them

10 making use of the critico-ideological terms and concepts elaborated by neo-realism, to confront the current contradictions of social and cultural life.

For these reasons we are led to ask how neo-realism was related to the culture of the anti-fascist movement, and above all, what were the characteristics and distinguishing features of that culture.

II

The most striking aspect of the activities of the 'men of letters' in the immediate post-war years was their impassioned fervour, their hopeful and enthusiastic drive forward, their concern to make up for lost time – these being characteristics of every programme and every new project. If we think back to the restrictive atmosphere of the previous twenty years, to the weighty oppression exercised by the fascist dictatorship and – different in kind, certainly, but no less serious for that – by the hegemony of Croce and his followers, we will better understand what an upheaval was needed at that time to break free of the provincialistic stagnation and the suggestions and hangovers dating from the recent past. Italian intellectuals, on whom participation in the Resistance had conferred a new and 'worldly' dignity, had every intention of exerting their influence to the full, even in this period of peace. Now the most urgent task was the reconstruction of the Homeland – and that the spirit and liberating energy of a new culture, of a revitalised and concrete rationality, might not contribute towards this would have seemed absurd. Two elements characterised the situation as described: on the one hand there was the impulse towards *renewal*; on the other hand – as a consequence of this and closely related to it – there was the attempt to construct more tangible links and interactions between *culture* and *politics*.

There was, in short, an earnest desire to

'rediscover the numerous no-entry zones that . . . (the preceding impositions) had helped to delimit and isolate. The enthusiasm of repressed curiosity stimulated research in the most disparate directions, in a bout of feverish activity in order to make up for lost time. Their minds virgin and interest renewed, Italian intellectuals – with the intention of placing their culture on a European, if not a world, footing – hurled themselves into Marxism, in its most recent formulations, as well as existentialism, into pragmatism as well as neo-positivism, into Catholic personalism, into the *ouvrierism* of Simone Weil, into American narrative, into expressionism, into the cinema; they became aware of the fruitful expansion of certain disciplines abroad – such as psychology and sociology; they attempted to revive ancient problems in new terms (for example, the problem of the South); they shed new light on the "first" Risorgimento^[4] which idealist historiography had traditionally left in the shadows (Cattaneo,^[5] Ferrari,^[6] Pisacane)^[7],^[8]

This posited as the first problem for a culture creating new functions and new values, that of expressing the idea 'not of pure solutions in a world untarnished by reality, but of the concrete problems of everyday life'.¹⁷ In short, the intellectual could not confine his activities to 'seeking out', elaborating and clarifying problems within a conceptual framework, almost as if he were a member of a sacred caste; he now had the job of collaborating on the project of constructing a new society, and of taking an active part in it:

'the savant must make his contribution towards providing us once again with the meaning and the human consciousness that give life dignity . . . now there is a general atmosphere, shared even by people who to all appearance are most uncommitted, of polemic and decision-making, of precisely – commitment'.¹⁸

This 'commitment' then came to signify, for the artist, the need to express 'reality', to plunge into it in order to *denounce* its evil and ugly characteristics and to contribute towards its betterment; for the intellectual, it came to mean participation in politics, or at least an activity on a par with politics.

This same fervour, enthusiasm and desire for renewal – *rinnovamento* – was exhibited by the political groups committed to the work of reconstructing a country devastated by war and poverty:

'on the morrow of Liberation the question at the bottom of everyone's minds was – restoration or a new start (even "revolution")? Should we allow our national life to follow the model of the pre-fascist era, despite all the twistings and turnings dictated by the new situation, or should we open up to the Italian people new horizons?'¹⁹

And no-one dared speak openly in favour of conservation or restoration.

The dramatic aspect of this situation was that it would reach its climax in 1948: events spiralled towards a crisis and then defeat, signalling the triumph of those reactionary and conservative forces which the cultural and political struggle of the immediate post-war years had promised to exclude from the nation's development.

'Between 1948 and 1955 it was possible to become aware of a failing; now that the ruling class that had favoured fascism was back in power, there returned, in all its most archaic aspects, the accompanying culture of Italian "conservatism"'.²⁰

And in all fields, progress towards 'normalisation' was fast.²¹

Thus we cannot be satisfied with a mere description or simple statement of the facts, but we have to dig deeper and analyse underlying causes; we have to discover what, already *within* the framework of this cultural-political phenomenon, set a limit to its

12 power and its capacity to effect a real and substantial renewal of Italian society. Leaving to one side – just for the moment – the 'political' aspect, the question we must ask in relation to the 'cultural' aspects of this activity is: what was the nature of this need for a *new start*, and in what direction was it pointing? And secondly, how was the relationship between *culture* and *politics* construed, in real terms?

When people claim to be effecting a new start, one of the first things we would wish to examine is their attitude to the past, or at least to the recent historical and cultural period being subjected to 'renewal'. Now it is an indubitable fact that the Italian intellectuals newly emerged from a reactionary dictatorship and from the war harboured a fervent desire for change, and yet:

'whoever scans the magazines, newspapers and pamphlets of the day is immediately struck by the *sense of continuity* that prevailed in the activity and cultural programmes of the post-war period, and by the extreme concord . . . at least up to a point, of ideas'.²²

Antonio Giolitti^[8] himself was to confess later:

'The intellectual and moral panorama which extended before us at the end of the war was certainly not of the kind to encourage a critical, and especially a self-critical, confrontation with the ideas and experiences of other groups or movements. . . . It seemed to me that in place of alternative formulations and new options, what we needed was continuity, a sense of coherence with the past'.²³

The widespread interpretation of fascism as a momentary 'perversion' or 'deviation', as a parenthesis in the history of Italy, naturally favoured such positions: 'things had to be renewed, brought up to date and adapted, but *within the same terms of reference as a tradition which had proved its validity in the course of the two previous decades*'.²⁴

Here we come to the heart of the matter, to the ground that is common to all the various attitudes adopted at that time: and that is the *conviction*, or the *myth*, that *throughout the fascist era Italian culture had remained neutral*, that it had in the last analysis followed its own course, bearing the weight of fascism merely as an incrustation, and leading a 'separate' life. This conviction could also be interpreted as a case of unconscious psychological withdrawal on the part of a whole generation in order to justify their own responsibility as intellectuals for the ensuing events – the underlying assumption being:

'that the culture which had accompanied fascism was not fascist; that the intellectuals, at most, were wrong in isolating themselves, in not leaving themselves open to certain experiences, in remaining aloof, *qua intellectuals*, from fascism. It was held to be self-evident that fascism was acultural; therefore culture was anti-fascist'.²⁵

Naturally no-one suspected that a certain isolation or apparent detachment might hide, in truth, implicit or explicit alliances, and could in no way resolve the personal and collective responsibilities of the intellectuals; no-one analysed the concrete relations between culture and society, between a set of historically determined ideologies and conceptual elaborations. The conclusion was that their culture had been valid and justified: an inquest, a negative verdict, was therefore not necessary.

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It is now standard practice, in essays of this sort, to go back to the figure of Vittorini and the experience of *Il Politecnico*,^[9] since the writer gathered about himself a collection of young people who, in a conscious and responsible manner, posed themselves the problem of a 'new start', of a reformulation of the tasks of culture. Now Vittorini's attitude, as it appeared in the editorial of the first number of the magazine, was as follows: what suffered the greatest defeat as a result of the war was culture, the whole of the culture epitomised by Croce, Mann, Huizinga, Benda, etc; its only shortcoming was that it never achieved majority status, it failed to conquer men's consciousness and reason; what had to be done therefore was to *spread that culture*, because, as culture – be it idealist, Marxist, or Catholic – it would have bettered men's consciousness and given them awareness of their concrete duties towards others, thus contributing to the reconstruction of a freer and more just society. The ultimate weakness of this position was in its complete absence of analysis of the relations between any culture (not *the culture*, a concept that still had aristocratic and caste-conscious overtones) and the real forces which are brought into play in a determined historical period; thus the links that bound certain intellectual currents to fascism, through their common bases and social origins, were not grasped, and the responsibilities borne by these currents and these men were never recognised.

'In short, to make the world a better place, our culture did not so much have to become a different culture – *changing qualitatively* – by turning itself into something that it wasn't before; it was enough that it sought to propagate itself, becoming the patrimony of more men – *increasing quantitatively*'.^[26]

These intellectuals were thus still imprisoned in an idealistic framework, precisely because they failed to see the need for an *inquest* into and a *break* with the preceding culture. Their paper plans for a new start and reform, in as much as they were still purely intellectual projects, limited to 'projecting' onto or 'smothering' reality with their own formulations, were bound to fail: they were condemned from the start to be the passive receptacles in practice for the dialectical working out of those social contradictions with which they had not settled accounts:

14 'the myth of a society that might overthrow the old bourgeois order, but might at the same time retain the most important values of the western democracies – from the New Deal to labourism – and might enable people to live with all the fiery moral intensity of authentic Christianity, was destined from the start to remain unrealised'.²⁷

The attachment of numerous intellectuals to political parties – especially to the two parties of the working class from which, for different reasons, sprang the impetus for a new start – and in any case the designation 'political' which was applied to all cultural activity of the period, came about because of a considerable indeterminateness and some very serious misunderstandings – these last never clarified precisely because of the failure to rethink the tasks of culture.

It is interesting to reproduce what Italo Calvino^[10] has to say about that period, keeping in mind however that his experience was a purely personal case:

'I open the Milan edition of *l'Unita*;^[11] the vice-director is Elio Vittorini. I open the Turin edition of *l'Unita*: Cesare Pavese^[12] is writing on page 3 . . . it was then that I discovered they had all chosen the same camp as myself: I thought it could not be otherwise. And then to discover that the painter Guttuso was also a communist! that even Picasso was a communist! That ideal vision of a culture at one with the political struggle unrolled before our eyes then as though it were entirely *natural*. (In fact it was not quite so simple: we were to bang our heads against the problem of the relationship of culture to politics for another fifteen years and still the question is not settled.)'²⁸

Here is an explicit indication of the ingenuous and delusory way in which so many Italian intellectuals believed they could make a judgment on the recent past and could draw up their 'programmes' for future activity, in *naturally* political terms. And it shows too how in their formulations the terms of Croce's anti-fascism came to play a dominant role, and that particularly in the problem of the relationship between culture and praxis these terms must have generated a vast number of misunderstandings in the post-war debates.

'Ever since the first world war Croce had pointed the finger at the intellectual who contaminated culture with politics, thus becoming the servants of the governing circles of the time': in these words N Bobbio²⁹[¹³] describes the first phase in the story of the intellectual's relationship to politics in Italy. We will not dwell here on the abstract quality of his argument – how he failed to point out that every culture takes sides and hence is always 'political'. But we must point out that such a thesis, if we see it as a tactical manoeuvre – a rearguard defence which intellectuals

resorted to in the face of fascism – could still have some value, though minimal; instead the totally idealistic and conservative character of Croce's position is unmasked at the very moment in which it becomes 'theory' – when it propounds its general thesis on the relationship between politics and culture. *And this is the ultimate weakness that bedevils all of the post-war discussions.* Bobbio again³⁰:

'The second phase was that of the Resistance. The relationship between politics and culture, as compared with that of the first phase, seemed to be inverted. Whereas before it had been culture in the service of politics, now it was politics, the new politics, that was directed by culture; it seemed to have been assigned the extraordinary task of placing itself at the head of the nation's new start. What had intellectuals been up till then? Nothing. What were they on the point of becoming? Everything. Out of abjectness their moment of redemption had come'.

In addition to the range of ingenuous illusions and misunderstandings which we have noted in Calvino, we may note in this statement from Bobbio, as in Vittorini, a tendency to regard culture as the aristocratic arbiter of taste, as the seat of universal values: the origin of culture is seen not as autogeneration from *within the womb* of the contradictions inherent in empirical and social reality; instead culture is supposed to *intervene* in empirical reality in order to guide it and govern it in the light of its universal values.

In short it would seem that intellectuals were compelled by force of circumstance to descend into the political arena, but not through internal exigency so much as through temporary necessity. It cannot be denied that in those years culture was active and committed – but it *endlessly re-affirmed and demanded its independence* from 'politics' (and what a serious error and mystification it was to say the opposite) which ensured that the debate was fought from rear-guard, 'liberal' positions. This is what lay behind the clash between Vittorini and a few of the leaders of the Italian Communist Party (PCI), amongst whom was Togliatti^[14] himself. It was not, as Franco Fortini^[15] rightly insisted, a question of demanding cultural autonomy, so much as the autonomy of certain political propositions in opposition to other political propositions: 'The demand for cultural autonomy – the request to be allowed to continue without fear of ex-communication a certain type of cultural investigation – was a political request'.³¹ In short, what was not understood was that culture and politics were – and are – the same thing expressed in different ways; it was not understood because this would have meant a 'qualitative' break with the idealist atmosphere of the past ie it would have plunged the sacred garments of culture into the stormy sea where political activity finds both its genesis and practical function. Fortini again, in a letter to Vittorini after the collapse of *Il Politecnico*,³² went straight to the heart of the matter:

16 'The error which even you seem to fall into sometimes is that of believing that the unity of culture and politics is something provisional, a marriage of convenience. . . . For myself on the contrary it seems clear that . . . the two are the same . . . that, in short, a distinction can be made only between two theories or two practices; and that each time a theory is not or only tenuously linked to practice, or practice is not or only tenuously linked to theory, then that "theory" will be very abstract, and that "political practice" very vulgar'.

To recapitulate: if we have characterised both the desire for a *new start* and the urgency of the new relationship between *culture and politics* as the fundamental features of the culture of the anti-fascist movement, so too have we tried to suggest the serious limitations of these features, *viz* in the first place, the *lack of a break* – the lack of any rupture in a qualitative sense – which was a negative characteristic of the 'new start'; and in the second place, the casual and *provisional* nature of the intellectuals' 'commitment' – founded on their insufficient analysis of the real historical forces and on options which did not succeed in breaking out of the idealist mould.

But what are the ultimate causes underlying these limitations; must we keep rigidly within the bounds of 'cultural' activity, and never look outside this frame of reference? Garin^[16] has some undoubtedly pertinent remarks to make on this subject:

'We had to see the sick side of our own past, and *reject* it as one can only reject one's own past, or else *negate* it via a new orientation whose relation to the past could but lead one to radically *reject* it'.¹⁷

It is also correct to state:

'To the intellectuals of the new democracy . . . there seemed to be lacking the real power with which to create the programmatic and political essentials of an authentically *new* beginning. . . . If the history of the period July 25, 1943* to April 18, 1948,** was dominated for their own ends by certain political forces (Ivanoe Bonomi,^[17] the old Giolittiani,^[18] etc) all of whom

* Translator's note. On July 24, 1943, the Fascist Grand Council passed a vote of no confidence in Mussolini, and next day Marshal Badoglio led a coup d'état which resulted in a new right-wing military government.

**Translator's note. On April 18, 1948, the first general elections to both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate held under the new Republican Constitution took place in a heightened cold-war atmosphere. The Christian Democrats won an absolute majority against the Communist-led opposition.

undoubtedly had an interest in interpreting the events of the immediately preceding decades in terms essentially of continuity (with fascism as a parenthesis), then the *culture* of the most advanced groups *failed* to create with sufficient vigour the practical – and thus not merely the rhetorical – conditions needed for an atmosphere of total rupture with the past'.³⁴

17

However – we might object – does not this 'lamenting' and this pointing to 'mistakes' etc perhaps mean that the writer has failed to escape from the framework of a conception of culture not too distantly related to that he is denouncing – to a culture which has always possessed the means to 'integrate and disarm'? How can one claim anything of culture without analysing concretely the *true social foundation* of cultural activity? Here we have uncovered – in our opinion – the ultimate weakness of these positions. The lack of a 'rupture', the incapacity to subject the past to the sort of inquest that would give a radical rejection as verdict, leading to an authentic 'rupture' – all this is denounced: *but is it wholly the responsibility of culture, or at least of culture alone?* We think not. If in terms of the real situation in Italy, ie one of struggle and the clash of social forces and thus of political groups, there had been a *sudden halt*, a *forceful inquest* into the past and an *authentic break* with this past, only then would we be able to make our 'claims' or 'criticisms' concerning the activities of Italian intellectuals. Whoever neglects *these* objective conditions in order to dream up programmes or to denounce 'mistakes', will be unable to go beyond the 'quantitative' stage, in as much as he tends to 'leap' across the real contradictions.

'Now that nearly twenty years separate us from fascism, we must be constantly on guard... against a highly dangerous illusion, *viz* that which is fostering the belief today that the political and cultural responsibilities for the imperfect evaluation of fascism and the anti-fascist movement can be separated':

thus any indictment of the literature and poetry – and cinema – of the period would be

'an absolute waste of time if it did not take the contemporary *political commentary* – both cultural and non-cultural – into account... such an indictment would not contain and would not have the status of a political proposition'.³⁵

We asked ourselves initially what was the relationship between neo-realism and the culture of the anti-fascist movement; we have indicated above some of the features and weaknesses of that culture. Now we must ask ourselves the question: are not the weaknesses of that culture the weaknesses of the anti-fascist movement itself? And in order to get at the root of the question, we must

18 judge the anti-fascist movement in *wholly political terms*. In a word, we must ask what role did culture play in the anti-fascist movement.

III

One point should be clarified at the outset: we do not approach the Resistance as disinterested observers, in order to study and analyse it on the tranquil plane of a mistaken 'autonomy' of historical research. The starting point for our study is the need to examine the interconnexions between the anti-fascist movement (and its outlet in the Resistance) on the one hand, and the workers' movement, with its goal of a transformation of society along socialist lines, on the other.

Such a line of argument has contemporary significance: it is obvious that a judgment on these past events must be closely linked to present-day political prospects, just as several important differences between the organisations of the workers' movement derive explicitly from their differing judgments on the Resistance, or rather on their differing opinions as to whether it is possible to discuss it in 'present-day' terms or not. Thus to adopt a particular attitude to the Resistance means also to seek out and isolate a particular thread running through the social development of Italy. — And again: as neo-capitalism forces us more and more into a reconsideration of Italy's anti-fascist past, so too does this exigency become a 'present-day' one.³⁶

If we examine how the impact of the Resistance has become a part of the political structure of the Italian republic, we can isolate several phases in this process. From 1945 to 1948 the Resistance was the chief factor behind the thrust for renewal which we discussed above: it was the foundation of the new State, and the starting point for every programme and every initiative. After April 18, 1948, when Italian society began its process of involution, and the reconstruction of the country was openly entrusted to the most conservative forces, the Resistance was almost banished, and became the symbol of subversion: one might say that, once the 'great fear' was a thing of the past, the Italian bourgeoisie wasted no time in dissociating itself from even that modicum of 'progressive' and democratic dynamism it had displayed in the anti-fascist period. There was no doubt whatever as to the conservative ambition of the bourgeoisie, consequent upon its class character: its options — those of the parties which represented it — were logical. And yet the left-wing parties, and the PCI in particular, insisted on speaking of the 'betrayal' of the Resistance, thus taking over the guardianship of all its value, and their continuity. The Resistance came to be the heritage of the left, this process being helped along by the attitudes of the dominant class reflecting the 'guerra facile' climate. *This period is very important, because it gave to the left the illusion (or the confirmation) that the slogans and the 'ideo-*

logy' of the anti-fascist movement were exclusively its own, and were part of its socialist heritage, or at least that the workers' movement was the chief factor, the 'hegemonic' force, behind these slogans and 'ideology'. This is the origin of the party's continual defence of the anti-fascist ideals as 'revolutionary', and its constant appeals to their 'present-day' importance.

19

The third period is that in which we are living at the moment: the Resistance has by now been integrated by the reformist wings of the centre-left and neo-capitalism, and is part of the official government line. Further, the non-critical and adulatory 'consumption' of the Resistance – on TV etc – is an incontestable 'betrayal' of the genuine popular imagination and the authentic progressive passion which was the driving force of the partisan movement. Nevertheless, when we are forced to take account of these manifestations of unity where men of the most diverse ideas are gathered together, and when we take account of the acclaimed anti-fascism of so many conservatives, then some measure of doubt emerges. And not just doubt concerning the present wave of opportunism, or concerning the effectiveness of a simple formula – anti-fascism – when today it covers even the most conservative interests: what we must ask ourselves instead is whether certain weaknesses, certain fundamental ambiguities, were not present in the very beginnings of that same Resistance, thus explaining how its ideals are being used for the most diverse and opposing ends. Neither do we consider this to be a deviation: our aim was precisely to locate within the anti-fascist movement those characteristics and elements which brought about its crisis.

When the Resistance is discussed – as it has been many times in 1965, the year of its twentieth anniversary – we find certain fundamental constants, and above all many misunderstandings, which emerge when the emphasis is laid on its weaknesses rather than on its victories. It almost seems that the greater part of the generation of the anti-fascist movement has rejected – in cases, unconsciously – the idea of a re-examination of the past, as this would mean calling into question all the convictions and chosen options of a whole life – in short, the responsibilities of everyone. This, as we know, is a very difficult thing to do. For the rest we have no intention of putting the 'generation of the difficult years' on trial: merely the presence of a certain number of men – not many, to say the truth – all of whom grew up twenty or twenty-five years before us, and have seriously called into question their own chosen options and convictions, would be enough to make such an enterprise unnecessary.

When we come down to it, the fundamental ambiguity common to all the arguments concerning the Resistance is the difficulty of escaping from the dilemma: accusation or defence? It almost seems as if we can do nothing but 'place history on trial' – *fare un processo all storia* – on the one hand, or to examine history 'in

20 its own terms' – *la storia 'nel suo processo'*.³⁷ Put this way, the problem can never succeed in transcending the dichotomy that opposes a facile moralism to a facile 'apologetic' historicism. This is the level of argument that we find, for example, in an accurate essay by Emilio Sereni.³⁸ In this piece, the observations which we made above concerning the generation of the anti-fascist movement would seem to find abundant confirmation: everything – criticisms, contrasts, difficulties – is brought together and dissolved into a state of perfect harmony – of both language and conflicting tendencies – so that we end up not knowing whether to admire this case of dialectical skill, or to fume over its empty phraseology. Basically, Sereni felt called upon to reply to two orders of objection. The first, the more serious, comes from L Magri, and runs as follows: the policy of the united front represented an alliance 'which left certain basic distinctions intact . . . ie it represented the form of the homogeneous unity a revolutionary strategy possesses when the distinction between the democratic and the socialist moments has not been liquidated'. Sereni's reply amounts to the claim that the anti-fascist movement had an *offensive* character *even from the workers' point of view* – something which leaves us not a little baffled – which logically carries him to the point where he formulates this extraordinary phrase:

'it was precisely the policy of the united front (rather than the policy of a "global alternative", or "class against class", or, worse still, a trotskyist declamation) that represented the concrete application in the real world – in the new historical situation – of the brilliant Marxist theory of permanent revolution'.

Thus in answer to the accusation that this policy belonged to the realm of 'bourgeois democracy', the 'revolutionary' character of the anti-fascist movement is proclaimed, with the added justification that it represented at that time the maximum possible programme – the furthest achievement of the class struggle. The second objection, a somewhat less serious one, accuses the anti-fascist movement of having failed to secure socialism, and thus of having been defeated. Sereni replies that this objection would be quite justified – had the aim of the anti-fascist movement been to build a socialist Italy. In fact this was not the aim, since, as Sereni says:

'in a situation of natural peril we can only succeed in arming the people – and ensuring the hegemony (via the unity) of the working class in such an armed popular struggle – by virtue of a policy involving a national and democratic front, with the sole end in view of a national and democratic insurrection: one which is open, of course, to the most ardent aspirations and hopes for society . . .'

This is all very true, except that it brazenly contradicts what was

said before: a movement which is explicitly described as a force organised on the level of bourgeois democracy, ends up being rehashed as the product of the Marxist theory of permanent revolution.

21

Having made these observations, we should like to point out that it is the moralism implicit in Sereni's outlook and perspective that we must reject: we have no desire to point our finger at someone and accuse him of not having done such and such, and lecture him that in 1945 there 'had to be' a socialist revolution, etc. We can reject this approach because we are familiar with the reaction such a socialist revolution would have provoked: we have the example of Greece, with its streets and squares occupied by English and American tanks, and its population prostrate through the effects of war and poverty. How important and decisive are such factors! But we must also reject the approach that 'justifies' everything that was done, in such phrases as 'the conditions were such and such — we couldn't have done any more', and above all we must reject the temptation to disguise the fact that at a certain moment in history the workers' movement was on the defensive and in retreat: we must reject the approach that labels such a period 'victorious' or 'revolutionary'.

These we would consider to be the fundamental points: the policy of the anti-fascist united front was formulated by Stalin in reaction to a defeat suffered by the workers' movement, *viz* the advent of fascism in Europe. This policy was dictated by the necessity of defending at all costs 'the socialist fatherland' from aggression. Essentially, it was a *defensive* response on the part of the workers' movement: the policy of big capital was to compel it to regard the conflict between fascism and the anti-fascist movement as fundamental, rather than the conflict between capitalism and socialism. Its fundamental error derived from Stalinism — *viz* the tendency to theorise every policy decision valid *at a certain time for a certain country, the USSR*, as a strategic policy valid for the world-wide workers' movement — and this was precisely the raising of a particular tactic — the anti-fascist united front — to the level of a global policy, which as a result of its non-class character could not fail to define its objectives in terms of bourgeois-democratic politics. This whole episode generated some very serious myths and illusions which were responsible for leading the workers' movement, especially after the war, to follow an essentially reformist line.

Whoever goes back to the reviews, newspapers and pamphlets produced in those years is immediately struck by the ideological dressing-up that the anti-fascist compromise received. Lenin, when speaking of compromises, did not deny that they would sometimes have to be made; but, he added, only on condition that their character as a compromise was openly declared — they were not to be exalted as a victory. The most dramatic aspect of those years is

22 the abandonment of the socialist struggle (ie its class terminology). Socialists had to agree to act *within the framework* of anti-fascist unity, *and in the end the class analysis – and language – peculiar to Marxism was rejected, and the non-class terminology of the broad anti-fascist movement took its ideological place.*

This rejection is evident, firstly, in the party line calling for a popular united front (and concretely, in Italy, for an armed Liberation struggle) and the formation of the Committees for National Liberation – (the CNLs); and secondly, in the immediate post-war years, in the party line on the problems of reconstruction of the country; it was then that the workers' movement had to pay for the errors of the preceding period. Let us take the first point:

'The international anti-fascist movement (the series of popular fronts) was the expression of a two-fold need, on the part of both the workers' movement and the ruling class: (a) the alleged necessity for the "defence of socialism in one country" led the workers' movement into an alliance with the "advanced" bourgeois forces, which in turn led to the abandonment of all class positions within the movement itself, in perfect correspondence with the *de facto* abandonment of socialist positions within the USSR; (b) within certain national capitalist formations, the anti-fascist movement, while it expressed an objective rift within the ranks of the dominant class, was seen by it as the instrument needed to re-integrate the working class into capitalist society.'³⁹

If we go back and examine the period of the Resistance in Italy, we shall find that the policies adopted by the workers' parties were never able to break out of the framework outlined above.

Let us take, for example, the armed struggle. We should not make so bold as to say that it was a mistake to take up arms against the nazis: but *the way in which the war was justified*, the slogans which upheld it, and the direction given to the movement – these we must criticise in the strongest possible terms. And this for two reasons: the first concerns the emphasis given to the 'war' at the expense of a line of argument in terms of class. We are perfectly well aware of the dramatic urgency that the presence of nazi troops conferred on the purely military factor: we are however convinced that by presenting the conflict as a 'national' struggle against the 'German invaders' and the 'fascist traitors', any autonomous initiative was precluded, and the whole movement was forced into a *neo-risorgimento* ie bourgeois-democratic, mould. If we go back to the early issue of the PCI review, *la Rinascita*, it soon becomes obvious that Marxist terminology was *de facto* put aside:

'We are well aware that we cannot say, even today, that the independence and very unity of our country is safe. The only thing that can guarantee this unity and independence is our success in

maintaining, on a democratic and anti-fascist foundation, the unity of all *true and sincere national forces*'.⁴⁰

23

'The working class and the parties that represent it have the right to hold high the banner of national anti-fascist unity, and around this banner will unite *all the healthy elements of the nation*'.⁴¹

Essentially there were no cracks whatever in the 'national pact', and the struggle was waged within its terms. The concept of 'class' – which alone can oppose and demystify the concept of 'nation' – was abandoned in favour of the term 'the people' – a handy notion that lent itself to any interpretation.⁴² As for the term 'class struggle', this was eventually dropped from the whole of the clandestine communist press and from a good part of the socialist press during the war of liberation.

And there is no truth in the claim that it was impossible at that time to follow any other course, owing to the 'objective conditions' (and how many crimes have been committed in their name!) or to the 'lack of preparedness of the cadres'. There are numerous testimonies from the period which formulated these problems in very clear terms. In 1943 a series of articles by Lelio Basso^[19] appeared, in which he declared his opposition to

'a general anti-fascist alliance which will in all probability end up tomorrow as a coalition government having no other aim than the restoration, at the expense of the working classes, of the former bourgeois order. . . . Such an alliance can only discourage the proletarian forces, fostering the belief in them that their only enemies are the Germans and the fascists, and not the capitalists';⁴³

and again his opposition to

'the allegation that fascism can be explained through the evil machinations of a handful of men, thus setting it apart from the mainstream of Italian history, and allowing the workers to forget that the seeds of fascism were present in the actions of Giolitti, Crispi,^[20] Depretis,^[21] etc, and even in the very structure of the Italian bourgeoisie. . . .'⁴⁴

Still more interesting is a letter dated December 12, 1943, addressed by three communists – calling themselves Carla, Nistro and Leone – to the Federal Committee for Lazio of the PCI.⁴⁵ It is an overwhelmingly honest letter, whose aim, the writers say, is to publicise

'a few criticisms that are being voiced not just by us, but by many comrades and workers who have not yet officially joined the movement, giving as their reason these very criticisms'.

Then follow several declarations of loyalty to the Party, making

24 it quite clear that the writers had no intention of creating a faction outside it. Then come the criticisms, which concern the contrast between the ideology and the general directives 'as they appear in *l'Unità*':

'when the propagandist, commenting on the 1848 Manifesto of Marx and Engels, quotes that "the working-men have no country; we cannot take from them what they have not got", how can the worker reconcile this with what he reads in *l'Unità*, when it urges him to "multiply the pitiless blows against the traitors to the Fatherland" (headline – no 26)? How come the interests of the working class are so often confounded with those of "the Italian people"? How come the Germans are mentioned so often, and never the German bourgeoisie? '

But where the letter reveals its profound intelligence, and avoids the charge of maximalism, is in its affirmation that

'We would not contest for a moment the need to fight against the "traitors to the Fatherland"; but we insist that it be stated clearly that we are fighting them not because they are traitors to the country, but because their actions go against the interests of the proletariat. It is essential that the Party's policies should have a Marxist justification!'⁴⁶

Our second point of criticism concerns the link between the struggle against the nazis, the national unity of the anti-fascist parties, and the programme for the reconstruction of Italy at the end of the war. It was at this point, we believe, that a very unpleasant fact came to the fore: it became clear that the workers' movement had only begun to pay for its defeat during the Resistance *after* 1945. The absence of a class position, which we have seen to be the defining characteristic of the anti-fascist movement, and an explicit point of policy in the conduct of the war, was at the root of the post-war programmes and future courses of the parties representing the working class. The most glaring weakness of this position was in its fostering the belief that the unity of the anti-fascist parties – which had been valid for a particular period, *and only against fascism* – could be maintained even after fascism had been defeated, and the time had come to reconstruct the country. We have already indicated the origins of this position, and today its ideological overtones need to be studied, in order to throw light on the post-war illusion that merely the good faith and unity of the country's 'honest' forces would be enough to overcome any class antagonisms; as well as the overtones of democratic humanitarianism, whereby communists could appeal to progressive capitalists, who were thought to be mindful of the national interest, to cut back on their own profits for the sake of the greater good. The fact is that both in regard to the period when the CNLs were func-

tioning, and to the period after the war, the political line put forward was much closer to reformism than to a class alternative.

25

'Certainly', as Basso says,⁴⁷ 'the Anglo-American presence... and the exigencies of the war itself ensured that a low priority was accorded the spontaneous efforts of the people: all the same it should be made as clear as possible that neither the allied presence nor the exigencies of the war could have impeded in the least a clear-sighted grip on the real situation in Italy on the part of the masses, had the workers' movement not been the prisoner of its own confusion — a confusion which was expressed in two widespread errors at the time. The first concerned the meaning of fascism and the anti-fascism movement (*viz* a lack of any deep awareness of the causes and class roots of fascism, an acceptance of the schematic and formal opposition between democracy and dictatorship, and the identification of fascism with the political superstructure of the fascist party (dictatorship, etc), and the second concerned the prevailing attitude towards history, which is not, to borrow an image from Rosa Luxemburg, a shop where you buy whatever you happen to need at the time (today political democracy, tomorrow structural reform, the day after tomorrow socialism) but is rather a total process, in which tomorrow is already present potentially in today...').

The insufficient depth of awareness of the class origins of fascism and the consequent lack of an historicisation of fascism itself as well as of the anti-fascist movement, were the most important weaknesses behind the policy options chosen at the time.

If, as we have indicated, in order to grasp the characteristics of the Italian situation it is necessary to go back to the fundamentals of the Stalinist-led anti-fascist movement, an Editorial in issue no 4 of *la Rinascita* in 1944, provides us with ample confirmation: after alluding to the tasks of a 'constructive' nature which the workers' movement will have to face at the end of the war, the editorial goes on to stress that today there exists

'a triumphant Socialist State — one which gave the decisive contribution towards carrying the *forces of civilisation and progress* to victory over those of fascist reaction and Hitlerian barbarism. Today this State is collaborating in the closest possible way with the great democratic nations on military matters, and *tomorrow it will collaborate on matters concerning the necessary Reconstruction*'.

What emerges here is a narrow interpretation of fascism as 'barbarian' and a vague conception of democracy — typical of the whole anti-fascist movement — which skips lightly over any serious class analysis: the import of these phrases can be flavoured to the full if we think what frightful consequences the close link between

26 Stalinism and reformism brought about in the political line of the parties representing the working class at the time. We need only consider the programmes and articles of the period, eg:

'The destruction of fascism will mark the foundation of a progressive democratic regime, ie the creation of economic and political conditions such as will ensure that fascism will never arise again; and finally the destruction of fascism will herald the urgent solution to the problems of the war and the reconstruction of Italy in a spirit of national solidarity and in the interests of the whole of the people'.⁴⁸

What is completely omitted is the fact that in order to create the conditions under which fascism will never again arise, meant then and means now to construct socialism. In addition, the term fascism is blurred, and is used in the sense of a particular and monstrous phenomenon, against which all 'sincere democrats' can be united. It was on these foundations that the formulae 'national solidarity' and 'collaboration in a government of national unity' were built.⁴⁹ One of the leaders of the PCI, Mauro Scoccimarro, in an address to the Second National Congress of the Party, saw fit to make this forecast: What is in the process of formation is an alignment of political and social forces from which will arise a democratic order based on a new system of class relations which can be represented as follows: *an alliance of the working class with the middle strata and a part of the monopolist bourgeoisie itself*; the political isolation of the reactionary big bourgeoisie; political leadership in the hands of the working classes.⁵⁰ Essentially any alternative instance or proposition was sacrificed on the altar of national unity, via the mystifying prospect of the working class playing the leading role in national reconstruction.

The reasoning which led the parties representing the workers' movement to give *de facto* aid to the conservative groupings in the capitalist reconstruction of the country, took as its starting point *the neutrality of the State* in regard to class struggle, a conception which is deeply-rooted in all reforming ideologies, old and new. The argument proceeded as follows: Italy is prostrate, on its knees, the people are starving; the workers' parties are the parties of the people, and hence cannot remain indifferent to the problems of reconstruction; *therefore* – and in this word is concentrated the essence of social-democracy – they must participate in the government whatever the cost in order that the people's demands be given the maximum attention. Of course, if these were the programmes as early as 1943, class logic was enough to account for the well-known results. It was thus that, in order to attain unity at all costs, the institutional compromise was arrived at, which, on the one hand, allowed the conservative forces to postpone the most explosive problems till better times prevailed –

'it ensured the recognition of the political and juridical continuity of the old monarchic and fascist State in the new post-war State, with the consequence that the Resistance, insurrection and institutional referendum were stripped of whatever effective quality they possessed in terms of *rupture* with the past – ie with all the institutions, laws, bureaucratic apparatus and, essentially, the social structure and power weighted in favour of the old forces, that this past involved'.⁵¹

Essentially it was the conservative forces which exercised hegemony, and they followed a shrewd political line which was framed, even during the war, around Italy's reconstruction in its global context. What the situation demanded, on the part of the workers' parties, was to oppose programme with programme, to develop in the masses a set of alternative demands, contradictory to the system, which would place on the agenda a 'qualitatively' different reconstruction, rather than a handful of reforms. This does not mean that it was necessary to seize power – what it does mean however, is that the workers' movement, even when defeated, needs to keep the real terms of the historical process clearly in view, and this might have led to the maturing of a socialist consciousness in the masses, which in turn might have forestalled so many steps backward in a social-democratic direction.

Indeed, when conditions permitted, the parties representing the working class were crushed by a government without programme, and on which they had not succeeded in exerting the least influence: they had no choice but to cry 'betrayal'. Thus, after 1948, the forces of restoration and conservatism returned to power – while Garin asked: 'Had they ever lost it?'

In this section we have indicated the essential features of the culture which emerged from the anti-fascist movement, characterised by its desire for a new start, and by the new relationship obtaining within it between culture and praxis (politics), and we have expressed the opinion that its fundamental weaknesses could be reduced essentially to the lack of a rupture with the past, linked to the failure to radically re-examine this past. But we should add – following Garin and many others – that 'a true anti-fascist endeavour' would have had to 'adopt a different policy by historicising fascism and its culture'.⁵²

It would seem to us that *it was necessary to break completely with the anti-fascist movement* – it had to be superseded and negated within a new set of policies, all of which would have to be linked concretely to the prevailing class contradictions. Why? Because the weaknesses of the cultural (and political) renewal after the war, derived once again from the root of the whole question –

28 ie the non-class character of the anti-fascist movement, together with the fact that the parties representing the working class – which alone were capable of the necessary rupture and re-examination – operated within the framework of the anti-fascist movement, and were thus constrained by the politics of capital, and by their own Stalinist situation.

The debate concerning the sort of 'mandate' given to culture by the anti-fascist movement is complex and many-layered; nevertheless there are certain constant features which it may well be worth our while to enumerate:

(a) The anti-fascist movement, given its non-class character, prevented culture from expressing itself in class terms, and defined it precisely in the old bourgeois terms as a 'kingdom of values', a sacred place: culture 'naturally' became anti-fascist, since fascism represented 'barbarity' ie non-culture. F Fortini made the timely observation that at the congress of anti-fascist writers held in Paris from June 21 to 25, 1935, 'the overwhelming majority of the interventions, coming from non-marxist intellectuals, were expressed in the very terms then being promoted by the communist organisations',⁵³ these organisations having accepted and made their own, the 'humanist' (bourgeois-democratic) interpretation of the fascist phenomenon. The link between the communist tactics of anti-fascist unity, and the vaguely humanist function assigned to culture, stands out for all to see in the words of the communist Vaillant-Couturier: 'In the struggle between barbarism and culture, the task facing culture is to win over the majority'.⁵⁴ But is this any different from all those statements coming from Vittorini and *Il Politecnico*, which we alluded to in the preceding section? And no less extraordinary – as part of an extraordinary intervention – was Bertholt Brecht's ability to put his finger on the problem when at the same Congress he stood up and without any preamble attacked 'the forces which are trying today to suffocate western culture in blood and excrement – or at least that remnant of culture which is left after a century of exploitation! In so few words did Brecht leave the anti-fascist platform far behind.

(b) On the basis of its political alliances, the anti-fascist movement erected its own culture. In Italy this came to be called 'the CNL culture'. Its defining characteristics were progressiveness, humanitarianism, and the struggle for justice. These intellectual tendencies were to have the same resolution as their political counterparts:

'Where, if not in the definition of fascism as "the enemy of the whole of civilisation", and thus of bourgeois civilisation as well? If fascism is in fact linked to capital, but via pathological, monstrous bonds, so that it ends up as the enemy of the human race; and if some time around 1935 there emerged quite clearly a concern not to subsequently "shock" the "well-disposed"'

writers and intellectuals with marxist terminology (and ten or fifteen years later the same concern would again raise its head in Italy) — *then* where these lines intersected we would expect to find the most faint-hearted, social-radical “humanism”⁵⁵

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(c) The status of ‘commitment’. In Garin’s words:

‘Even the political options of many intellectuals at that time were the options of particular parties; *such options were thus kept separate from the intellectuals’ essence as human beings*, and could turn out to be either mechanical or moralist-romantic, and therefore, in the last analysis, delusory’.⁵⁶

But why? In its arguments over cultural renewal, the Italian left, like others, was committed, from the very moment it accepted the non-class character of the anti-fascist movement, to a policy of preventing its cultural outgrowth from adopting a new, ‘qualitatively’ different set of attitudes: the anti-fascist culture was thus limited to promulgating a *renewal of the content* of the former culture, and, in as much as it suppressed discussion on the class origins of the personality of every artist and intellectual, it remained extraneous to their ‘human essence’, and thus was precipitated into crises and backward steps. ‘Popular’ subjects thus provided an opportunity for many artists, both writers and film-makers, to mystify and leave to one side a serious analysis of themselves.

IV

I began by attempting to demystify some of the critiques of neo-realism in which its strong ties with anti-fascism are either denied or distorted. The previous chapters have argued that a concrete historico-critical analysis of anti-fascism and anti-fascist culture is necessary if this, the best period of the Italian cinema, is to be understood in its proper context.

It would be wrong to skirt over the ‘specific’ nature of problems of the cinema with general hypotheses. Style and outlook on the world, common ideological positions and the varying personalities of particular artists, are connected by a whole complex of inter-relationships. But if neo-realism is taken to be a specific, ‘autonomous’ area of expression of the particular politico-cultural moment sketched above, then undoubtedly ‘a reading “within the text”, a “stylistic” reading, should, if rigorously carried out, . . . produce the same results as a critique “from the outside” . . .’⁵⁷ Any attempt to limit discussion to ‘internal’ analysis in the narrow sense can only result in incomprehension of the basic underlying motives. One of many such examples is a long, studious article by Franco Venturini on the ‘Origins of Neo-realism’.⁵⁸ The author rightly deplores the lack of ‘a sufficient awareness of the essentially historical nature of the problem’ in the critical investigation of

30 neo-realism; and argues that the best way to develop a critique is to

‘research the subject chronologically and attempt to locate the origins of the phenomenon in the history of the Italian cinema’; and therefore ‘to trace its roots in the recent and distant past of the Italian cinema, and on this basis delineate the development and history of the neo-realist tendency. It is therefore strictly an historical undertaking’.

But the rest of the article is far from meeting these quite correct proposals, and it turns out that Venturini uses the term ‘history’ in a somewhat restricted sense: his analysis is limited to a description of a series of linguistic or ‘cultural’ trends which together make up the neo-realist tendency. They are, according to him: ‘the regionalist tradition; calligraphism;^[22] the influence of French realism; Camerini^[23] and Blasetti,^[24] Luchino Visconti; and the documentary school.’ It might well be pointed out that American and Soviet cinema (and literature) are excluded from this synopsis; but what is most striking of all is the weakness of a ‘historicism’ position which gives no more than a superficial account, not even touching the centre and substance of the problem. I would be the last to deny the influence of French naturalism, for example in Visconti, or of experiments with the documentary in Rossellini, or of Eisenstein and Pudovkin in the intellectual development of the *Cinema* group: but to admit this does nothing to advance our understanding of neo-realism or of the individual directors involved. The point is that even ‘stylistic’ choices reflect not only individual ‘taste’ or inclination in matters of language, but something much deeper: the ethical (practical/operative) relationship which the artist – like everyone else – forms with reality, and which leads him to choose certain ‘forms’ of expression and not others.

The same consideration applies to the validity of the term ‘neo-realism’: as we saw above, it has been challenged by those who deny that a unified artistic movement is possible, and propose instead a monographic treatment, on the grounds of the differences in style and success of Rossellini, De Sica or Germi.^[25] Simply to explain why one thinks that these directors have a similar style, or a common approach to montage, would be to take up the argument on their terms. It is quite a different thing to argue that the unity and potential of neo-realism are the result of its very close ties with anti-fascism and the Resistance: such a position is based on the conviction that every cultural and/or artistic movement which merits definition as such does so only because from the outset it expresses a common view of reality, and because, implicitly or explicitly, its poetic and cognitive outlook are related to a practical aim or mediation.

This perspective clarifies the relationship between neo-realism

and fascism, one of the central themes of this study. It has to be borne in mind that the mediation and objective of neo-realism was the anti-fascist movement; and that any position on neo-realism is therefore closely linked with one's view of anti-fascism. The preceding sections have discussed elements within neo-realism as an introduction to neo-realism itself. The question which should now be posed is whether there is in fact such a thing as an 'ideology' of neo-realism, and if so what are its characteristics, and its relationship to anti-fascist culture.

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There can scarcely be a man of culture who would deny that the neo-realist cinema was the most advanced form of artistic expression in Italy in the immediate post-war period – notwithstanding the fact that neo-realism was also to be found in painting, literature and the theatre. The term 'neo-realism' itself seems, as Sapegno says, to have been 'born in the cinema, where it represented a body of valuable experiments, a concrete experience the more capable of developing freely and spontaneously, because it was from the outset unhampered by pre-existing linguistic traditions, and because its relationship with the mass of the people was easy, direct, and even a necessary part of it'.⁵⁹ The cinema was naturally pervaded by the atmosphere of intellectual fervour and the desire for renewal characteristic of Italian culture at the end of the war:

'In the immediate post-war period the disembowelled cities saw the return of survivors haunted by the concentration camps, and of the soldiers demobbed from an army humiliated rather than destroyed. It was a period still permeated with the drive for reconstruction, and the thirst for justice, summed up in the "spirit of the Resistance". It was not just that the dead had fallen in a desperate but abstract search for freedom: through them the non-elect, those who were never among the protagonists of history, also expressed the demand for social emancipation and the transformation of the State. . . . This spiritual tension, in which the only basis for the future was to suffer and to hope, was the primary though not the only source of the new Italian cinema, the expression of a hard-won maturity – the maturity, that is, to look honestly at one's own mistakes, and gain a clarification, a forward impulse that would, through the individual, regenerate society'.⁶⁰

Here too there was zest for renewal, a new view of the relationship between art and reality, art and society: 'Italian artists were confronted with a rich panorama of possibilities. Their imagination was fired by that desire to criticise custom which the turn of events had distributed more diffusely among other nations. Italian culture had the opportunity to mature overnight, to sweep away all the rhetorical secular stratifications oppressing it and barring it from

32 participating in the more general movement of European culture'.⁶¹ After years of retreat into an hermetic existence or the evasions of surrealism, the Italian artist could now feel a strong bond with his own country, and with the civic and moral problems of the whole of society. He came face to face with the section of the country which most obviously and genuinely represented both suffering and hope: the 'non-elect', the people. The results of this encounter were the famous films which are still the glory of the Italian cinema today: *Roma città aperta*, *Ladri di biciclette*, *La terra trema* and many more of greater or lesser importance. What then is the explanation for the crisis of the cinema after the 1950's – its retreat into conformity, its abdication of social responsibility? Was the substance of neo-realism understood, even at its magnificent height? I think not. The reason, in my view, is to be found in a framework of criticism restricted to description and explanation, and not touching the roots of the phenomenon. This kind of critique has been the prisoner of anti-fascism, unable to transcend it in a positive direction. Pio Baldelli has perceptively observed that

'the distortion began when the "myth of the origins" of the Italian cinema took the place of an ordered account of the facts in which the various historiographical hypotheses (on the strengths and weaknesses of the Italian cinema) were dropped: which was itself a wrong approach, notwithstanding the mass of facts and political events cited. A particular year (1951 or 1953) is usually given as the turning point, and the investigation of the failings of the Italian cinema is never taken further back. The beginnings of neo-realism are decidedly dressed up, and the early films attributed with the greatest degree of historical understanding, political clear-sightedness, immense social significance, and trenchant, violent poetry and polemics. Then "all of a sudden" after that year, neo-realism rapidly gets bogged down in compromise; and at this point our recent history appears to branch off in two different and quite unrelated directions'.⁶²

This alleged 'betrayal of neo-realism' is easily related to the 'betrayal of the Resistance' referred to in the previous chapter.

If however we accept that the only way to assess what happened in historical terms, is to clarify the problems of the development of the 'ideology' of neo-realism, and of its ability to express the reality of the period, the argument immediately comes back to the limits of anti-fascism – which, I repeat, is its true mediation, its practical medium. There are two reasons for this: firstly, neo-realism took shape under fascism, and therefore in a sense rose up against fascism, reflecting all the limitations of cultural opposition to the regime. Secondly, in the Resistance the neo-realist opposition met up with anti-fascist politics. Anti-fascist inter-classism compounded the ambiguity of neo-realist anti-fascism, or

rather, deemed them 'progressive' and 'revolutionary'; and anti-fascism, by mystifying and confusing the examination of its real terms, involved neo-realism in its own crisis.

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I have used the term 'neo-realism' even for the period before 1943, because this date obviously signifies the outpouring of moods, views and positions, which had been building up throughout the previous decade: the will for renewal, the aspiration towards art in the service of reality and truth, are clearly evident in the writings of critics and men of the cinema who declared themselves in opposition to the stagnant, evasive atmosphere which dominated the medium at that time. It is this critical position which must be examined, to see how the 'opposition cinema' was formed,⁶³ what were its perspectives, and on what values it was based.

The basic element seems to be the anti-bourgeois motivation, the polemic against a narrow, closed, egotistical view of life, a view disillusioned with reality. Parallel to this is the polemic against formalistic calligraphic art, in which a real lack of ideas is hidden behind a refined style.

'The absence of love', wrote Lattuada^[26] in 1941, 'has produced many human tragedies which could have been avoided. It is not the golden rain of love, but the black mantle of indifference that has enfolded mankind. . . . This is the origin of the gradual decline of all values, the destruction of consciousness, sterilising it to the very roots'.

Men must instead

'break the bonds of artificial modernism and renew the flow of love. . . . Man awaits the return of the riches he has lost, his warmth of feeling and affection, his Christian solidarity'.⁶⁴

The attack is directed not just at commercial films but at complacent formalism, 'the anonymous, constant play of frozen images, the faithful reflection of a class of deluded, melancholy individuals, completely absorbed in their hermetic existence'.⁶⁵ What was called for was a new, different cinema, for which the public too 'will feel the need of a new warmth, of more human contact . . . and will then be able to distinguish between what is true *life, feeling and humanity* and what is only a mask'.⁶⁶ This passage clearly expresses the positive values of a rejection of falsity and rhetoric, the sincerely felt aspiration for genuine human communication. But its limitations cannot be ignored. Above all, such positions remained remote from the substantial problem – the fascist class dictatorship – and were therefore objectively obliged to separate artistic criticism from real political criticism. The discussion of art and culture was therefore not concrete, and its basis remained a kind of idealistic subjectivism which also affected the post-war period.

The target of the polemic – the ruling class against whom the new demands were made – is moreover identified by a whole complex of *attitudes*: egotism, indifference, conformity and hypocrisy; the values to which appeal is made are the 'genuine feelings' of love, sincerity, disinterestedness, and natural solidarity uniting all men. The 'revolt', if it soothed the conscience of this group of intellectuals, in no way challenged their social origins, and ended up in moralising. De Sica's film, *I bambini ci guardano* (1942-3) is a typical product of all this. Lizzani writes that 'Adultery is seen through the child's experience of it, and the terms of the classic entanglement, long used indifferently by novel-writers and columnists, become in De Sica elements of a drama resolved in the denunciation of petty bourgeois conformity'.⁶⁷ What he does not say, however, is that there is no mention of the crisis of the family, the problems at the roots of a case of adultery, the origins and formation of a marriage; but instead everything is explained in terms of the egotism and coldness of individuals, to which the film counterposes the sincerity and human warmth embodied in the child. It is useless to protest, 'what else could be expected?' – the objective difficulties of the material and of his work are obvious, and I do not wish to claim that De Sica is other than what he is: or bewail his 'lack of content'. But the 'denunciation' is carried out in the name of moralising sentimentalism of a quite impotent kind, with conservative if not downright reactionary results, when all the responsibility for what happens is placed on the mother's shoulders for her egotism. If the film has some worth – and it has – it is not for its 'denunciations', but for the sequences which best express the outpouring of the author's sentiments, his desire to resolve the real contradictions, the evil surrounding him, in an act of love and intellectual 'virginity'. Its merits of course exist only within the limits of the ideology as I have tried to outline them.

The important point to stress from the outset, is that the Resistance and the anti-fascist movement did not represent a change or turn in this line of evolution. The whole of the ferment of neorealism found a coherent, genuine (and not at all voluntarist) outlet in the Resistance, giving it the 'objectivity' it lacked at first, and, moreover, the illusion of being a part of History and speaking in the name of History. Both the social and personal pain, the drama and tragedy of war; and the specific political and social consciousness of active anti-fascism, were real and important factors in helping to create the moral tension and genuinely – but generically – 'progressive' drive typical of the period. Nonetheless its real encounter was with the inter-classism (class collaboration) of anti-fascism, and the moralistic anti-bourgeois sentiments I attempted to explain in the previous section. The strong links between the inter-class politics of anti-fascism, anti-fascist culture and neorealism, are apparent in the common framework in which they operate: the concept of 'man'. The values adopted by these move-

ments are the struggle against 'evil', 'barbarism' and 'egoism'; universal brotherhood in the wake of catastrophe; the union of all good and honest men for justice and peace; and the pitiless 'denunciation' of social injustice, with the aim of getting it 'put right'. The war was 'irrational chaos', expressing the worst side of 'human nature'; 'evil' had forced everyone to do something they should not have; the 'survivors' had to cling onto each other, overcome the old barriers, and work together — if they were 'honest' and 'in good faith' — to create a just society, not of subjects but of 'people'. Isolation and solitude were broken down, men recognise each other as companions in misfortune, sharing the same morality. The enemies — the egotists, the unjust — would soon be overwhelmed by this wave of love.

Thus, in keeping with the ambiguities of the anti-fascist movement, many intellectuals attempted to transcend their class origins (egotism and individualism) through intuitive contact with others, under the banner of 'love' and 'brotherhood'. In other words, they remained within the bourgeois framework, not challenging it as such, but only in its 'worst' aspects.

The same argument applies to the work of the neo-realist directors, their contact with popular feelings. Their basic limitation was that their concept of 'the people' was the same as that of anti-fascism: an ethnographic entity embodying the most traditional values of bourgeois culture: 'patience', the spirit of sacrifice, and eternal hope. Just as the concept of 'the people' had been a necessary prop to faith in progress and the programmes of the anti-fascist New Deal, it came to compound the crisis of sentimentalism and the illusory, mystical hopes of Italian artists. There is therefore considerable attraction in the theory of neo-realism as a sort of neo-romanticism — despite the different implications this later acquired. In Sansone's words, 'It was a kind of neo-romanticism which fed on the new needs of social existence; and like every movement relying on faith and commitment, it therefore carried with it an eternal appeal to truth, a denial of individualism and isolation, a rejection of art as the privilege of the elite or of individuals, a new appeal to purity of form and of ideals, and a proclamation of faith in the practice of free poetry and literature.'⁶⁸

What needs adding is the reformist-enlightenment component central to all strains of anti-fascism, expressed in the so-called tradition of 'denunciation'. Lattuada wrote in 1945:

'A great degree of daring is called for. Are we beggars? — let us show our rags to the world. Are we defeated? — we shall look disaster in the face. How much do we owe to the Mafia, to hypocrisy and bigotry, to conformity, irresponsibility and bad upbringing? We will pay all our debts with a fierce love of honesty. Our confession will light up our crazy secret strengths, our belief in life, our superior Christian brotherhood'.⁶⁹

36 The denunciation of something evidently, then, pre-supposes that there is a neutral power or being to turn to for the disease to be cured. There was a growing conviction – based on the view of fascism as no more than a ‘dictatorship’, the ‘corruption of the lawful state’ – that the centre of power was, not the point of economic production, but ‘the State’ as an administrative organ: a typically bourgeois democratic theory⁷⁰ which received wide support in the immediate post-war period – unfortunately, as we have already seen, even in much of the workers’ movement.

‘In this sense it is correct to say that precisely by making the State responsible, neo-realism recognised it and subjected itself to it, using not subversive, but profoundly legalistic language. This was true both of lawyers like Piero Calamandrei,^[27] Leonardo Severi^[28] or Jemolo in *Italia tormentato*;^[29] and of the review *Il Ponte*, which published, under the title “This Society”, an editorial on the story of Caterina Rigogliosa, later told by her in the short film by Zavattini^[30] and Maselli^[31] . . . Anti-fascist polemics, in other words, suffered from the delusion of having a broader base than in fact existed, when they offered the minority of the bourgeoisie the chance to make a free self-criticism: this self-criticism, this reflective, non-aggressive attitude, and the implacable tension of the other, anticlerical, polemic, made moralism the essential logical instrument of neo-realist cinema’.⁷¹

It is necessary today to fix the historical and ideological terms within which the neo-realist movement operated: for years they have been confused and mystified. This in no way implies that the cognitive and poetical advances of the neo-realist school of cinema should be denied, but rather that they should be located in the right perspective. The mythology of neo-realism arose when its aesthetic achievements were confused with meta-historical ideological truth, or anyway transferred to the plane of ideological values – be they positive or negative – alien to actual neo-realism.

The genuinely progressive impulse in anti-fascism should not be denied: it expressed demands from below, genuine popular participation in the armed struggle, and the hope for social renewal: though of course always within the bounds of anti-fascist strategy. Neo-realism too has great merits: it marked the arrival of the cinema as a genuine medium of expression and communication. In the best cases at least, it expressed a serious desire to break with all the establishment mannerisms, intellectual complacency and aesthetism, together with a desire for renewal, and a search for a new, different ‘social mandate’ for the artist: De Sica’s ‘sciuscia’, Rossellini’s partisans, and Lattuada’s ex-servicemen, are directly related to a ‘contemporary’ climate and an ongoing historical process. On the screen they assume new, more humane and realistic dimensions, and are no longer subordinate to the story. This liberation from the concerns of the ‘big film’, and grasp of

the living essence of things, is the greatest strength of neo-realism: the camera becomes an eye on life'.⁷² Much of what Italian critics have had to say on the results of neo-realism is positive and acute: but it should be stressed that it holds only as long as the strengths of this school are not put down to subjectivist causes, to 'imagination' or to a new and magical 'view of the world', or to ideological and political bases to which they are completely unrelated. Take for example the film *In Nome della legge* made by Germi in 1948-49. It relates the experience of a young priest, who is intelligent, honest and trusts in the goodness of Law and Justice. He is sent to a remote Sicilian village where he is faced by the traditional problems of the island: the violence of the Mafia, the collusion with them of the economic, political and legal authorities (the Baron, the Mayor and the Lawyer); the connivance of the population; the conformity and fear of the representatives of Justice; and the desire on the part of the central authorities 'not to make trouble' — which is in effect complicity. The whole of the first part is clear, decisive, well-sustained. Then an implausible traditional love story is fitted into the plot, involving the Priest and the Baron's unhappy young wife (a 'Northern' woman trapped in the situation); and the story ends with an improbable agreement between the Mafia and the Priest, after scenes of romance, shoot-outs, and the Priest's renunciation of the woman's love in the name of his higher calling. How can such a film be judged — by saying that its strengths balance out its weaknesses?

It could be said that the first part is good — the events ring true, the narration is concise — but that the second part of the film is a 'let-down' for neo-realism, and the film is therefore a failure. This is the approach of, for example, Luigi Chiarini:⁷³ up to a point, he says, the film is 'true' to neo-realism, the content atmospheric and well-grasped;

'but the psychologically artificial drama . . . inserted into it . . . and the happy ending . . . represent a shift in emphasis away from reality and into melodrama and epic, which saps the strengths of the film and turns it into a hybrid of neo-realism and hack commercial formulae. Once again the director has been *unfaithful to his world* and failed to give clear and decisive expression to his material'.

Instead of counterposing to the film a subjective, external model, to decide what does or does not form a part of the director's world(?), what is needed is an explanation of *how* a certain 'world' (ideology and poetry) can encompass good and bad, potential insights and falsifications. The basic limitation of Germi's film is his enlightenment-style reformism, which comes to light when the abstractions of Law, Justice and the State are counterposed to real difficulties and contradictions;⁷⁴ which is all the more mystifying since it is never admitted that Law and Justice themselves both

38 cover up and give expression to the worst 'injustice' and 'social evil' of all: class exploitation. There is therefore nothing surprising in the artificial ending: rather, it is typical of the author's 'world' of social democracy. This is not to deny that the film has certain merits in vision and style: the author's 'enlightenment' positions are perfectly sincere, and a genuine indignation and impulse towards reform run throughout the first part. The priest's encounter with a hostile environment is accurately portrayed; and this part is concisely, directly narrated. But because the starting point is so abstract, this kind of 'enlightenment' position does not produce drama: it precludes a deep-going, dialectical explanation of real contradictions, and therefore *necessarily* slides into sentimentalism and melodrama. The narrative tone, too, weakens, the stylistic features — the American western and naturalistic sequences — are no longer sustained by a unifying passion for insight, and become a burden on the film, setting the seal on its failure.

This example is illustrative of one essential point: that no discussion of neo-realist films and style is exhaustive if it fails to take anti-fascism as the medium and historical goal of neo-realism. It has to be seen that the political crisis of anti-fascism implies a crisis in the cognitive-poetical instruments of neo-realism. There are two elements to this:

(a) The crisis of 'commitment' and of the 'denunciation' trend. The development of Italian society and the class logic of capitalist reconstruction left less and less room for anti-fascist moralism and moral indignation abstracted from a serious, thoroughgoing examination of the real contradictions. The alternatives offered by anti-fascism — unity of the forces for progress and peace, denunciation of poverty and social conditions, and the appeal to 'values' — were gradually absorbed by the system. It was when the organisations of the workers' movement found themselves in crisis, unable to put forward a real socialist alternative response to the system, and becoming integrated into reformist politics, that 'social', 'committed' art found itself without any point of reference in practice. The result of its attempt at 'commitment' was a series of mystifying, objectively artificial (and even counter-revolutionary) works, abstracted from actual conditions.⁷⁵

(b) The crisis of neo-realist 'communitarianism'. The relationship of the neo-realist artist with 'others', with the people, was intuitive, rather than being based on a thorough understanding of his own individual nature. Credited by anti-fascism and the political culture of the workers' parties, especially the CP, with being a 'revolutionary' new expression of the modern, social artist, it turned out to be an illusion, a 'marriage of convenience'. Individualism and solitude, the typical elements of bourgeois art and culture, since they are to be overcome by an act of love rather than by conviction, became once more the basic themes of the best Italian films. Antonioni is in this respect the typical, coherent heir

of neo-realism, the indication of its last deep crisis. In this respect too one can understand — as a 'loss of the other' — the element of the 'transcendental' in directors like Rossellini and in another sense, Fellini.

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Italian film criticism should be given its due, in particular for its attempts to relate the particular subject to a wider — if generally superficial — area of culture: and for its efforts to make criticism a social instrument, never divorced from the aspiration to change custom. Nonetheless it is necessary to mention what I believe to be its basic limitation: the fact that its aesthetic hypotheses — however perceptive — are never related to a serious scientific analysis firstly of Italian society in general, and secondly of the ideological moment, the search for understanding in every artistic expression. Because it gives a mystified image of anti-fascism, even the positive aspects of the critique of neo-realism became distorted. Faced with the crisis of neo-realism, it is unable to go beyond moralistic regrets or empty phraseology, precisely because it does not admit the real crisis of anti-fascism. Anti-fascism, in other words, represents the mediation, not only of neo-realism itself, but of the critique of neo-realism, and conditions its judgments and standards. It is therefore necessary for it to do as I have done here, turn to the 'critique of the critique', lay its cards on the table and declare its allegiance. The only way to understand a critical position — without having to accept it in its own terms — is to ask what is the view of reality underlying it, and to what real perspectives or what forces it is related. The examples I give below serve to demonstrate that even the most specialised theories are, below their surface appearance, human products, to be related to the complexity and contradiction of human relationships in general. This is not to detract from their 'autonomy', but — I hope — from their 'divinity'.

1. The assumption of anti-fascism as an unconditionally positive historical category does not exclude differences in tone or emphasis on values which diverged in all directions with the aid of its inter-class ambiguity. The ideological use made of the Resistance by the Communist Party in the post-war period led to the incorporation of neo-realism in the scheme of its strategy. We have seen that its starting point was the anti-fascist unity of culture: and the same national unity key was used in the interpretation of the Italian cinema, mystifying its values. A typical case is that of Umberto Barbaro — who nonetheless held his political views with a rare degree of honesty and sincerity. Some of Barbaro's aspirations are correct: his search for aesthetics 'inspired by marxism-leninism', making it possible to 'define the particular character of specific manifestations, that is of individual works, and their degree of realism, according to their social standpoint and the position of the individual author in the face of reality. . . . In other words, only

40 criticism inspired by marxism-leninism can lead to the correct valuation of works in all their complexity and in the entirety of their ideological significance and their social importance and influence, as well as their real worth as art'.⁷⁶ Even in this position we still come up against a conception of anti-fascism which may share its genuine popular feeling and ingenuous faith in progress, but is unable to locate its historical nature, and is trapped in the myth of its unity. Barbaro states that 'the young Italian critics present themselves in *Bianco e Nero* and *Cinema* as ever more decisively anti-formalist and in differing degrees, anti-fascist'; but it is precisely anti-fascism which explains the limitations, ambiguity and basic errors of such opposition. Its nature is automatically assumed to be 'popular'. On this basis the critic goes on to distribute lavish praise I cannot subscribe to, in particular grossly over-valuing a supposed 'realist tendency' in the early Italian cinema, with reference to Martoglio's film *Sperduti nel buio* (1913-14) and *Assunta Spina*. Of the former he boasts that the fascist regime 'did not realise the decidedly socialist basis of the film, even if it was rather milk-and-water socialism; it definitely expressed a strong class spirit'.⁷⁷ This is typical of the identification of the terms 'people' and 'class', and at the same time 'naturalism' and 'realism', made in anti-fascist ideology. Barbaro was also convinced that it was Soviet theories and films which showed Italian film-makers the 'way forward of realism'. There is an element of truth in this, in that they appealed to art characterised by rational communication; but they were really only an element, and not the most important at that, in the maturing of young Italian film-makers in the pre-war period. The main stimuli and influences they experienced stemmed from a different set of problems from those of the revolutionary Soviet climate and, I believe, produced quite a different kind of cinema. The intrinsic weakness of Barbaro's position is that he amalgamates Italian and Soviet cinema under the banner of 'freedom, progress and peace', and places all artistic success in the convenient category of 'realism'. This is inadequate as an explanation of the great work of the Eisensteins' and Pudovkins', but it put the work of the Italian directors in an illusionary revolutionary light. Gramscian^[32] language and the terminology of the Resistance fitted perfectly into this perspective: neo-realism became 'the expression of a new, national, popular and progressive spirit',⁷⁸ 'of the national, popular and progressive unity' which was the great strength of the Resistance and 'the real fruits of the morals and poetry of neo-realism'.⁷⁹ The crisis of neo-realism, far from leading him to re-examine his positions with a serious analysis of the changed conditions of Italian society, accented the weaknesses of his populist outlook; and it would be wrong, because of the sincerity of his hopes, to pass in silence over such major errors of perspective as he committed with De Sica's film *Il tetto* (1956): in the midst of

the complete crisis of the period, it continued to reiterate the artificial moralistic proposals of worn-out anti-fascism. Barbaro responded with the conviction that

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' this film not only provokes a reaction of contempt for its target . . . but firmly proclaims the obvious truth, opening an infallible way out of an intolerable situation of social injustice: the truth that the union of the working class is invincible '.

One must both regret that a critical venture came to such an end, and feel an urge to reject such mystification.

Countless critics followed this example. The whole cultural policy of the PCI towards neo-realism ran on similar lines: Alicata^[53] himself wrote that neo-realism should be seen as

' the renaissance of a free, modern, national Italian cinema, born in the crucible of anti-fascism and the Resistance, and interpreting the demand for " truth " and renewal integral to a culture which can and will re-discover its links with the people '.⁵⁰

The motive indicated above of the encounter between neo-realism and ' the people ', with all its ambiguity, might have been justifiable in the immediate post-war period, but in 1955, it was vulgar, and it was a heavy responsibility to argue for it: not only because of its bearings on a ' commitment ' now dying away, but because of the implications for the political strategy on which it was based. ' The result ', writes A Asor Rosa, ' was that the death of anti-fascist ideology, evident at the creative level, was not readily accepted at the level of criticism and theory '.⁵¹

The Italian cinema was ' motivated by two convictions ', wrote G Puccini in 1948. ' They are: firstly, that the Italian cinema is popular; secondly, that it is national. . . . Our age in fact faces the gigantic task which was barely begun by the generation of the Risorgimento: the task of making Italy a modern, united nation.

. . . This work was begun (or rather, re-begun) with the overthrow of fascism, which signalled also the overthrow of everything un-Italian or anti-Italian in it . . . '⁵²

These were the aspirations of national-antifascist-risorgimentist ideology. Given where it has led us, should we really lament that such a faith has been ' betrayed '? Should we take up the same watchword, the same perspective, today? My answer is no: on the contrary, it is necessary openly and firmly to take up the issue of its historical failure as an ideology relating to socialist aims.

2. Much more relevant to the attempt to understand neo-realism, are the positions of those I would call the ' apologists ' of neo-realism, personified in Brunello Rondi and Giuseppe Ferrara. They openly take up a neo-realist standpoint, attempting to put all

42 ideology on one side, to be able to identify with the object of research and so, they say, avoid giving a partial, deformed picture. Ferrara, for example, says that

'since neo-realism is a new way of looking at reality, in the art of the cinema as in every art and every field, and since I believe strongly in neo-realism, I have tried here to develop a neo-realist analysis, abandoning all prejudicial orientations, which I have good reason to distrust, be they idealist or Marxist'.⁸³

Such is the intention. In reality, however, these writers succumb to the temptation to erect neo-realism into a new historical ideology which they make their own, and take as a yardstick. They place themselves within anti-fascist inter-classism, sharing all its hopes, myths and illusions: in a sense they put themselves on a metaphysical plane, uncritically accepting the components of Resistance ideology, denying it to be an (historical) ideology and accepting it under the category of the Spirit, or of 'human potential'. Given this basic and very serious limitation, it must be said that their analysis of neo-realism is the sharper, and brings us closer to the reality of the artistic phenomenon, by operating from within, passionately espousing all its aspirations and hopes, and expressing it in authentic tones.

Rondi explicitly takes it as his starting point that the Resistance 'was not only the sign of a temporary unity, the levelling enthusiasm of varying ideologies committed to a common struggle, but also something new, simple and valid in itself, full of spiritual wealth'.⁸⁴ I have already said that there was indeed a 'Resistance culture': but I have also shown its serious limits and ambiguities, the illusions it generated and which led it into certain crises. Rondi however accepts its positive side uncritically, as 'valid in itself', and genuinely shares its beliefs, giving the reason that the Resistance 'was in a sense the first lyrical (and illusory) dawning of a real Italian unity';⁸⁵ 'for the first time in many years, Italy and Italian society experienced a new cohesion, sharing common problems, situations and historical horizons'.⁸⁶ This Resistance, a new 'moral emotion', was 'the great human and historical matrix of neo-realist feeling'.⁸⁷

The most striking aspect of the Resistance experience, for an ethical existentialist like Rondi, is the best and most genuine aspect of inter-classism, the 'collective feeling' of Italian hearts which 'fuses best of all in cinematic art':

'The moral atmosphere of the Resistance is here rediscovered in a feeling of consciousness in isolation, sincerity in risking oneself; it was a communal experience of small groups of people, a sense of being able to participate together in a collective history, impelled by great events and urgent necessity. . . . Distances between men which had seemed insuperable, vanished at a stroke. Men

discovered they were essential to each other. . . . Never had individual conscious effort been so closely allied with collective confidence'.⁸⁸

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While all these elements may have been stressed, was not the complex of contradictions and historical articulation suppressed? Rondi often comments on this:

'The Resistance, with its specific formative morality, inspired neo-realism with a sense of history as the common participation in continuing personal responsibility and effort':

'they (the neo-realists) spontaneously, with no programme and no voluntaristic pride, clung to *life*, re-discovering it in all its virginal purity, and in a heavy, but welcome, responsibility'.⁸⁹

Much of what he says on this is perceptive and acceptable, though still very uncritical. The illusory nature of his beliefs – which are those of anti-fascism – becomes apparent when he notes that universal participation in a common history

'was offered to all, everyone could feel necessary: the peasant together with the lord. . . . It should not be left to "great events" or emergencies to bring the peasant and the lord to see that there is a common history to be made, actions to be undertaken together, infinite distances between them to be broken down. It was and is necessary to make the lesson operative in day-to-day life'.⁹⁰

Such perspectives always contain the danger of ontology and terminological hypothesis; unfortunately, even this form of 'ethical historicism' – which is itself limited enough – is lost when he affirms that neo-realism is 'the concrete and "classically" tragic expression of the human condition in its modern historical perspective';⁹¹ 'the cinema of human isolation, of the distance between the lives of individuals, separated by indifference or hatred . . . (giving) the feeling of a lack of cohesion and closeness between the lives of human beings'.⁹² So far I can agree, out of the conviction that this school represents the crisis of the artist (of 'man') in bourgeois society as he tries, under the impulse of great collective suffering (the war) and deep moral urges, to overcome class contradictions in a communion of love, in a generous – but vague and merely intuitive – nostalgia for or hope of re-discovering a lost unity, the 'cohesion and closeness between the lives of human beings', whose loss is so strongly felt. But as always Rondi fails to explain, he only proclaims, and his conclusions, explicitly linked to a kind of spiritualistic existentialism, are to develop a theory and in effect an ideology of 'objective neo-realism'. The artist for him is obliged to base himself, 'not on metaphysical knowledge nor on some absolute ideal norm, but on a perspective of reality, a "meaning" formed in reality itself, and to take this as the dynamic

norm of the same development of reality'; 'it is the result of renouncing positions prejudicial to reality . . . of renouncing pre-conceptions . . . it is almost like Heidegger's concept of truth, letting that which is be as it is'.⁹³ Here the vitalist element, which is part of neo-realism as it is of every anti-fascist movement, is taken by Rondi to be the indiscriminate, inconclusive measure of historical understanding.

Giuseppe Ferrara's well-researched book has the same limitations, but he does not yield to the temptation to theorise too much, and pays more attention to the unfolding of events in all their complexity. His starting point is the fact that ' "the culture" and determinant moment of the best of Italian cinema is the Resistance':⁹⁴ a correct point, already argued here several times. But what is immediately perplexing is his view of the Resistance as

'a spontaneous development, an impulse of moral rebellion which arose as an attack and rejection of the past. . . . In the face of this all class and party barriers were broken down, as if under the direction of a unanimous higher faith. . . . It was a second Risorgimento'.

The martyrs of the Resistance, the tragic events of the partisan war were 'the episodes most relevant to the formation of a new national consciousness. There was an immediate, spontaneous repayment'.⁹⁵ As I have repeatedly pointed out, such terminology incorporates all the ambiguities and illusions of anti-fascist inter-classism into a positive category. The weakest, least acceptable part of Ferrara's analysis is however where he elaborates on the relationship between the culture of the immediate post-war period and neo-realism. He takes up the substance of Vittorini's views as symptomatic of the best and newest manifestations of the whole period, writing that 'in *Il Politecnico* Elio Vittorini issued a call which threw the whole of the past into doubt and remains valid today'.⁹⁶ What he refers to here is Vittorini's statement that culture was the great and only victor of the war and that therefore it was necessary to have a culture which would not only console man but protect him. I have tried to illustrate the profound weaknesses of such arguments, which do not admit any break and therefore fail to challenge the past. But Ferrara, instead of struggling for a historical, critical view, accepts these positions *en bloc*, declaring that rather 'the Italian cinema seemed to respond readily and spontaneously to the appeal issuing from the Resistance, for clarification'.⁹⁷ This leads him to conclude that 'the new cinema . . . leapt over all traces of the past, and *became the people*, and it was this basic break which made it so stupendous and exceptional'.⁹⁸ A manifestly inadequate verdict, imbued with all the mythology of the Resistance, whose mystifying character I have already pointed out.

' the study of the real world of relationships. Man had previously been seen from only one angle, and poetic lyricism had concerned itself only with the aesthetic nature of his existence. The war, and the moral values which resulted, made it impossible to go on in the same way, analysing man only internally. . . . Neo-realism decisively brought to an end the last experiments in romanticism. The new man has to be studied as a nucleus of living relationships, a " centre " from which infinite stems reach out. The artist of the second half of the century must seek out relationships between men, between man and society, man and things . . . '⁹⁹

Ferrara's lack of analysis is evident in the passages on Rossellini, the director he seems to like most. What I wish to draw attention to is the critic's attitude towards the crisis of the director of *Roma, città aperta*. Ferrara limits himself on this to simple statements which explain nothing because he is unable to criticise ' the great ' Rossellini, and the values his artistic expression represented. Rossellini had already explored the material world:

' now he is examining the spiritual relationship. . . . But this is an *illusion*, and leads him, consciously or unconsciously, to abandon his vital, modern side, that " something " which made *Roma, città aperta* the first of a new kind of film, embodying historical understanding. He now rejects it for another kind of understanding — theology '. So Rossellini's original will to influence others changes in kind: ' the quality of his activism is no longer historical, but theological '.¹⁰⁰

Ferrara continues his exposition of these ' weaknesses ', taking the two films *Amore* and *Stromboli* as symptomatic of the crisis: they no longer have the ' temporal vibration ', the ' spatial and ethnic determination ' of before; the countryside is reduced to no more than a ' scenic background '; in *Stromboli* the characters are ' old, empty, inward-looking, lacking any of the profound relationships ' characteristic of his best works; and Ferrara concludes that ' Rossellini claims to have attained theological knowledge as a replacement for historical knowledge, but the attempt is doomed to remain incomplete, half-way between that and realism '.¹⁰¹ But why is this? Ferrara gives no explanation. Similarly he would be unable to explain the spiritualistic, transcendental endings of many of the courses of intellectual development which began with the culture of anti-fascism, with *Il Politecnico*, and moral exertion. That would mean understanding the illusory flash, the superficial, intuitive, unsubstantial nature — however sincerely felt — of that contact with the people, the partial character of the renewal achieved by the culture of the Resistance: once the exceptional ethical drive of those years had gone, the slight basis of the ' marriage ' came to

46 light, relationships with others were lost: even the profound relationship with the 'landscape' – always the result of cognitive endeavour – was lost. Only by challenging anti-fascist culture – and more basically, the inter-class nature of fascism – can we explain the successive turning inward of so many artists, Rossellini included. Ferrara does not undertake such a re-examination: on the contrary he precludes it, and can then only impotently bewail the director's 'obstinacy' in 'error',¹⁰² and the 'covert but undeniable betrayal of the spirit of democratic co-operation left by the Resistance (the spirit of *Roma, città aperta*).¹⁰³

3. Luigi Chiarini has very similar positions, though often with very different formulations and opinions. His critique of neo-realism is always along two lines: on the one hand it interests him as 'the intuition of the cinema medium', as 'pure cinema' – and this relates to his conception of the '*specifico filmico*' and the distinction between the 'cinema' and commercial films. On the other hand, he attempts to establish a historical link between neo-realism and the Resistance, between neo-realist 'feelings' and the spiritual ferment of post-war Italy. This is not the place to make a detailed study of Chiarini's theories of the 'specific': it need only be said that his opinions on the 'documentary' character of neo-realism, and the aesthetic hypotheses he draws from it, are always related to the other side of the problem, the ideology of the film. He states that 'the essence of art, as neo-realism has shown, is attained only outside the commercial film and all the "fictions" it requires',¹⁰⁴ and that therefore 'the insight of neo-realism lay in having felt all this as a need for artistic expression outside of ideological and educational straightjackets: it lay in having located the real essence of the film . . .',¹⁰⁵ concluding that he has found

'some Italian neo-realist films to be most advanced in modern cinema . . . in them the most significant elements of past experience fuse with an original intuition: the desire to explore the reality around us, without the mediation of "literary" elaboration and the resulting film clichés, but directly and immediately through the camera'.¹⁰⁶

But here the terms left unexplained are precisely those of 'ideology' and the 'exploration of reality'. 'Films', in particular the neo-realist genre, bear the 'stamp of reality', says Chiarini: but what reality? The problem is already posed by the separation of the study of technique and style from that of ideology, and of the historical-aesthetic implications of art, which is always a matter of human communication. In fact, as long as a critic's analysis is restricted to the 'medium of expression', or to 'language', without being linked to a particular view of reality and a thorough understanding of the cognitive process expressed in art, he remains within subjectivist, normative bounds. What therefore needs to be

explained is why the neo-realist directors used one style and not another to express their world of experience. The only way to do this is to investigate their relationship with reality, the motives which drove them to act: in a word, their ideology. When Chiarini says, as he constantly does, that neo-realism operated 'outside of any prior ideological framework', he is playing on an ambiguity and falsifying the matter. He confuses 'ideology', meaning programmatic and intellectual positions, the conscious intention of the artist prior to his work, and 'ideology' and partial and historic direction, the dialectical 'meaning' of reality which is present in every artistic creation – and in every human activity – and which has to be sought out within the work, which has become a part of it. Chiarini mystifies the basis of this confusion, by denying that neo-realism has an ideology, viewing it as the authentic expression of 'truth' and 'reality'. Bearing in mind the identity of neo-realist and anti-fascist ideology, as I have tried to explain it, it can be understood that Chiarini in turn was quite incapable of seeing anti-fascism as the expression of historical *dialectics*, its moment as 'partial'; he thinks of it as 'absolute' and 'spontaneous', and therefore remains uncritical and a-historical.

Chiarini is aware of the importance of neo-realism 'as the expression of the ideological orientation and state of mind of our people':¹⁰⁷ in neo-realist films 'a common world and method is to be found even where there are differences; an identity of interests, a similar spiritual attitude towards reality':¹⁰⁸ he also notes the 'need to see man in his relationship not only with other men, but with society' – but he fails to explain this 'ideological orientation', this 'similarity in outlook'. He maintains that the most acute film critics were those who defined neo-realism as 'socialist realism', arguing that 'this is certainly a more correct position, as long as we are in agreement on the meaning of the word socialist'.¹⁰⁹ He then proceeds to give a definition of socialism, and of neo-realism, which is worth quoting in full, as typical not only of Chiarini himself but of a widely-held attitude:

'If . . . by socialism we mean the need for social renewal, born of a reaction against the injustices of what is still in many respects a *feudal* society; of a genuine, rather than literary or rhetorical, discovery of the human personality; of a revolt against war and violence, a concrete love for one's neighbour and a human interest in the reality surrounding us: a need which makes one feel it a duty to curb the excesses of individualism, and perform an act of both love and humility – then we can say that neo-realism is socialist realism. Such an attitude, which is more widespread than the prevalence of egotism and factionalism might imply, finds an early identifiable stylistic direction in the cinema. It is precisely that of neo-realism'.¹¹⁰

Rarely have the diffuse motivations united in anti-fascism been

48 summed up in so few words: the risorgimental-mazzinian element, scorn for 'feudal' remnants, revolt against war, voluntaristic 'mortification' of individualism, and Christian humility. By contrast with this outpouring of sentiments, what detached contempt is shown for the 'prevalence of egotism and factionalism'! Real contradictions are hereby resolved: anti-fascist humility made everything 'objective', and neo-realism was the fruit of 'a world in travail and convulsions, whose own representatives could not help but share in the same ideas, emotions and reactions – even, I would say, the same conclusions'.¹¹¹ Once again we find the myth of 'humanity' re-discovering itself in a display of solidarity. Even 'the dominant character of De Sica's and Vittorini's neo-realism is a product of the fact that their social polemic is not based on a given ideology, but on human motivation',¹¹² as if there could be humanity and morality which were not objectively (historically) 'ideological', that is, which tended in one direction and not another. It is in any case a subtle means of avoiding the need to explain the nature and complexity of this 'polemic'.

With such premisses, it is difficult to give acceptable reasons for the crisis of neo-realism. Even Chiarini's tone is preaching and moralistic: he carps at the neo-realist directors for not having the courage to be 'logical', 'they do not wish to give up commercial filming altogether'.¹¹³ The whole problem seems almost to be reduced to that of language, 'enlightenment' of the documentary kind which Italian directors knew too little about 'to have introduced it into their various works'.¹¹⁴ Or else – and here he is at one with the most thoroughly idealist critics – he tries to explain the turning inward by 'the passage from style to mannerism' as in Genina's *Cielo sulla palude* (1949).^[114] What is needed is an explanation of the director's starting point, which is reactionary and artificial, aestheticist and false: but Chiarini instead informs us that 'the director has been betrayed by his own mannerisms, which move him away from his inspiration, which anyway he was obviously unaware of'!¹¹⁵ He ends with a warning: 'beware, even the artist can without realising it slide from style into mannerisms. The latest Italian films are the fruit of this'.¹¹⁶ There is nothing more to be done except to bewail the 'spoiling' of *Europa '51* and console oneself with the thought that 'Rossellini would have been able to give us another good film if he had remained true to neo-realism'.¹¹⁷ The subjectivism of these positions is still more marked when Chiarini avows that it will live on in true artists, being 'far from dead', because 'objective conditions always give the basis for neo-realist poetry'.¹¹⁸ These views have already been examined and criticised in the first section, as locating their exponents in an unmistakably idealist position.

4. I have stated several times that anti-fascism is the historically-determined medium and end of neo-realism, and that any dis-

cussion of the phenomenon must necessarily be based in a serious and critical analysis of anti-fascism. The critical positions I have examined, trapped by the inter-class myths of anti-fascism, are unable to give a serious explanation of the crisis of neo-realism, because they are unable to grasp the seeds of it in its origins and early period. The causes of the involution of anti-fascism have to be sought in its very nature, and the same is true of neo-realism.

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I should like to conclude with a critic who has tried to come to grips with the problem: Guido Aristarco. Faced by the crisis of neo-realism, he states the need to undertake an examination 'to clear the field of any trace of artificial apologetics, and go beyond apologetics to criticism and theory'¹¹⁹ — not in order to detract from the value of neo-realism or deny its merits, but because of the real need to face up to it in a conscious, constructive manner. What does Aristarco take to be the limitations of neo-realism? — He starts from Lukacs's observations on 19th century realism, his distinctions between 'description' and 'narration', 'naturalism' and 'realism'. Neo-realism limited itself — though not in every case — to 'description' or 'naturalism': Aristarco cites Visconti, in particular in *Senso* (1954) as showing that neo-realism ('naturalism') led to 'realism': 'naturalism only describes phenomena, the present; realism reveals the essence of the phenomenon, its whys and wherefores. Naturalism is limited to the reproduction of daily life; realism aspires to the greatest depth of understanding . . .'.¹²⁰ In this sense neo-realism was a 'chronicle' like Zola's novels, while Balzac — and *Senso* — were more like 'history'. 'Zola observes and describes; Balzac is participant and narrator.' Of course — Aristarco says — narration and description are not

'rigidly defined attitudes, or water-tight compartments. . . .

Even after *Ossessione Visconti* did not give up descriptive work.

. . . Nor can it be said that artists like De Sica and Zavattini only and always describe and never narrate . . .'.¹²¹ but basically, *Roma, città aperta*, *Paisa*, *Sciuscìa* etc . . . which shared the new spirit of the Resistance, were "chronicles" — and what chronicles! — of the heart of everyday life, and for all their great artistic, moral and political worth that is what they remain'.¹²²

Even Aristarco therefore leaves unresolved the problem of neo-realism ideology, and its relationship with anti-fascist ideology. It is my belief that it is impossible to discuss neo-realism as a school of chronicle without any explanation of the 'whys and wherefores': anti-fascist ideology is of a complex, articulate kind, with a whole series of justifications and rationalisations, and is strictly related to a definite perspective for the future. Aristarco's view that the limitations of neo-realism lie simply in the reproduction of everyday life, is profoundly idealist — not least because he uses Lukacs's terminology mechanically and schematically, without pre-

50 ceding his use of them by a discussion in class terms: and this is something which has to be said, since Aristarco claims to be a 'Marxist'. Hence he still expresses an aristocratic view of culture, reducing the whole problem to the question of one cultural tendency or the other, and not seeing it in relationship to reality. All neo-realism lacks, it appears, is 'cultural experience', to explain the whys and wherefores and overcome its simple 'original experience': everything is, and remains, a problem of culture. 'Naturalism vs realism' means nothing without an explanation of the author's view of reality, and not of a simple reality, be it of Balzac's time or today, but of the contradictions and development of Italian reality. Aristarco's practical 'mediation' has always been generic anti-fascism of an uncritical and superficial kind: this is the only explanation for such statements as: 'If the Resistance goes on, the Italian cinema will go on' – which are otherwise quite inexplicable in 1955.

Let us look, for example, at Aristarco's attitude towards De Sica's *Il tetto* (1956). This is an important 'test' because at that period of crisis and growing monopoly powers, it aimed to re-begin the cognitive-poetical theme of anti-fascist 'commitment' which was by then fading away; and its moralism is reflected in the lightness of the psychology of the film. But Aristarco thinks that what is wrong is that it is not a 'novel': 'Zavattini and De Sica still lack the "central category", the "fundamental criterion" of neo-realism: the "character" . . .'; it was time to advance from neo-realism to realism: 'what is required is not to change the flag, as Zavattini fears, while the battle is in progress; but to carry on the battle with the flag held high. . . .'¹²³ From beginning with a desire to look at neo-realism 'critically', Aristarco now obviously finds himself mouthing empty phrases. He too is unable to give a full critique of the nature of anti-fascism, and therefore an historically accurate account of neo-realist ideology, with all its strengths and weaknesses.

What Aristarco fails to take into consideration, is the nature and limitations of anti-fascism; its crisis; the relationship of culture and anti-fascism; neo-realism and its crisis; and the crisis of the Italian workers' movement in the 1950's. Some may object that this is not the job of a film critic – not even a marxist film critic? – but in reply to them I would vehemently defend the arguments contained in this study.

Notes

1. Guido Fink, 'I molti vizi del critico disoccupato', in *Cinema Nuovo*, 1965, no 175, p 178.
2. *Ibid.* We are perfectly well aware how necessary it is, within this second position, which we support, to make these distinctions. But *from within*. Fink on the other hand puts himself on a plane above the struggle, so that he appears to be totally unaffected by

the situation he is denouncing – or rather describing: in fact, he is not making any distinctions at all.

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3. G P Dell'acqua, 'Un'eredità difficile ma vincolante', in *Cinema 60*, August 1964, no 44, p 13. (Italics in quotations always those of author. N & R.)
4. *Il Convegno di Parma*, personal accounts in *Rivista del cinema italiano*, March 1954, no 3.
5. Dario Persiani, Vittorio Stella, P Gadda Conti, Mario Gromo and others.
6. 'The unique defining characteristic of poetry, whatever its theoretical foundation, is *imaginative activity*', in *Lo Spettatore Italiano*, January 1953, p 16.
7. Dario Persiani, *art cit* These positions are echoed by Vittorio Stella, when he writes:
'... the nature of art in its essence is realistic, in so far as it can be traced back to expression of absolute reality, and as such, it constitutes one of the forms – that denoted as imaginative – through which the spirit weaves the plot of its own life.'
(*Rassegna del film*, 1953, no 18). Stella is in agreement with Ragghianti in conceiving of film as a language which tends 'essentially to liberation in art', though not relieving it, *as a means of expression*, of its practical and conceptual functions.
8. Dario Persiani, in *Lo Spettatore Italiano*, April 1952, p 181.
9. Piero Gadda Conti, in *La nuova antologia*, September 1955, p 73. See also M Gromo:
'... to stamp these films as neo-realist would be rather hasty as they belong simply to the same period, this being verifiable via the obvious criterion of chronology, and recognisable via their *repeated assumptions* as to their *common social context*...' (*Cinema Italiano*, 1954, p 99).
10. Vittorio Stella, *art cit*.
11. '... (One might consider) this alternation between realism and naturalism to be nothing but the formulation, in the terms of a particular poetic theory, of a law common to all artistic expression, namely the recurrent crystallization of poetry into literature'. Dario Persiani in *Lo Spettatore Italiano*, January 1953, *cit.*
12. '... this being the essential condition to be satisfied if Italian cinema is to survive and is to renew again and again its own poetic options'. Dario Persiani in *Lo Spettatore Italiano*, June 1952, p 283.
A no less disconcerting example of subjectivism is to be found in a piece by Mario Gromo, in which he offers us some reflections on Rossellini:
'He became an artist whenever an immediate reality inspired him. ... Then having been everywhere recognised and exalted as the founder of the so-called neo-realist school, *this must have worried him a great deal*; and then he drove himself to pursue *strange temptations* in the cinema, working on them with a degree of skill that, as an end in itself, could not but fall into the conventional. Nevertheless he remains a director of great talent ... and certainly has more surprises in store for us, *provided only that he returns to listen to his own voice*' (in *Cinema Italiano*, 1954, pp 111-112).
Note how the myth of 'autonomy' here serves to conceal and smother any possible explanation that is serious and concrete.
13. 'La sceneggiatura del film neorealista', in *l'Unità*, August 24, 1955, reproduced in *Servitù e grandezza del cinema*, Rome, 1962, p 193.
14. 'Il filone idealistico della critica del neorealismo', in *Giovane*

Critica, Dec-Jan 1963-64, p 53 *et seq*; see also *Problemi di teoria generale del neorealismo*, in *Cinema, Libro Quinto (Cinema - Book Five)*, Milan, 1964. This work by Oldrini would benefit by treatment at greater length.

15. Nino Ghelli, *art cit*.
16. Bruno Segre and Raffaello Matarazzo, 'I problemi della cultura', in *Il paese come se*, edited by S Pozzani, Milan, 1961, pp 304-305.
17. *Ibid*, p 306.
18. E Garin, *La cultura italiana fra '800 e '900*, Bari, 1962, p 231.
19. Mario Sansone, 'La cultura' in *Dieci anni dopo*, edited by R Battaglia and P Calamandrei, Bari, 1955, p 517.
20. E Garin, *op cit*, p 271.
21. 'The Italian cinema too . . . will have to abandon the drive, as well as the subjects, of its denunciations'. Bruno Segre and Raffaello Matarazzo, *op cit*, p 310.
22. Mario Sansone, *op cit*, p 521.
23. *La generazione degli anni difficili*, edited by Albertoni, Antonini and Palmieri, Bari, 1962, p 158.
24. Mario Sansone, *op cit*, p 519.
25. E Garin, *op cit*, pp 254-255. The 'neutrality' of culture under fascism is treated by Sansone, and it is the underlying theme of the book by G Ferrara, *Il nuovo cinema italiano*, where we read: 'Croce-Laterza, together with Omodeo, De Ruggiero and Russo constituted a point of reference, *a refuge of ideals in the midst of chaos*. Culture behaved as if the regime did not exist, and certainly opposed it, pursuing its own, somewhat detached and subterranean road', p 12).
26. E Garin, *op cit*, p 254.
27. M Antonini, 'Introduzione' to *La generazione . . .*, *op cit* p 14.
28. *La generazione . . .*, *op cit*, pp 79-80.
29. In *Politica e cultura*, Turin, 1955, p 197.
30. *Ibid*, p 198.
31. 'Cos'è stato il Politecnico?', in *Nuovi Argomenti*, no 1, Mar-Apr 1953, p 194.
32. Now reproduced in 'Cos'è stato il Politecnico?', *op cit*, p 195.
33. E Garin, *op cit*, p 252. And again: 'Only via an effective "historicisation" of "fascist" culture was it possible to set in motion a line of argument that was new, rigorous, neither moralistic or vulgar, nor limited to introducing new notions without changing their substance . . .' (pp 262-263).
34. Bruno Segre and R Matarazzo, *op cit*, pp 307-308.
35. Franco Fortini, 'Precisazioni', in *Verifica dei poteri*, Milano, 1965, pp 60-65.
36. We shall use without distinction the terms 'anti-fascist movement' and 'Resistance', though we are well aware of the historical complexity of the whole movement: we are therefore willing to accept possible distinctions at the level of method. On the other hand we are firmly opposed to recognising any substantial distinction between them, such as is frequently made by Catholics. This can be seen, for example, in the address given by Professor S Cotta to the National Congress on the Resistance (Rome, 23rd-25th October, 1964). In opposition to Cotta's thesis, we should like to draw attention to the article by Filippo Frassati, 'Una polemica con i cattolici sulla Resistenza', in *Critica marxista*, Mar-Apr 1965, pp 76-90, in which he says: 'There is no course open to the Catholic intellectual . . . other than that of denying the historical continuity between the anti-fascist movement and the Resistance: only via this disjunction, in fact, is he able to confront so effortlessly the theme of the

Resistance over the years 1943-45, after he has prejudiciously eluded the insoluble knot of contradictions which had characterised his attitude to the preceding period', in particular to the Spanish Civil War.

37. To borrow some of G Amendola's expressions as reproduced in *Unità e socialismo*, a debate between G Amendola, L Basso and G C Pajetta, *Rinascita*, 17th July, 1965, p 15.
38. In the essay 'Appunti per una discussione sulle politiche di fronte popolare e nazionale', in *Critica marxista*, March-April 1965, pp 6-28. The quotes which follow are taken from this essay.
39. Umberto Coldagalli and Gaspare de Caro, 'Alcuni ipotesi di ricerca marxista sulla storia contemporanea', in *Quaderni rossi*, n 3, Milan, 1964, pp 102-108.
40. 'Unità nazionale', in *La Rinascita*, 1944, n 3, 'editorial'.
41. *Ibid.*
42. This rejection of the term 'class' in favour of the phrase 'government for the people of the people' is acutely characterised – using Togliatti's famous address on returning from the USSR – by A Giolitti, in 'I comunismo in Europa', Milan, 1960, 'Introduzione', p 28.
43. In *Bandiera rossa*, Milan, v 1 n 2.
44. *Ibid.*, v 1 n 3.
45. Now in *Critica marxista*, *op cit*, pp 125-127.
46. The PCI's reply to this letter gave mocking short shrift to the 'ridiculous' arguments put forward by the 'ingenuous' comrades Carla, Listro and Leone, all of whom were then scolded for their 'infantile attitudes' and for having dared 'to rival the party line on a national question'. It might be of interest that in the presentation of this letter, written by Filippo Frassati in 1965 (*Critica marxista*, *cit*, p 91) we still find – *twenty years later* – these same phrases 'infantile extremism' and 'sectarian resistance', as well as a defence of the 'firmness' shown by the Party in its reply.
47. In *Problemi del socialismo*, September 1963, 'editorial'.
48. 'Unità nazionale', *cit.*
49. In this connection we will not dwell on such incongruities as calling capitalists 'honest' – meaning presumably that they will all be content with 'equal profits'.
50. See *La Rinascita*, 1945, n 5-6, p 135. See also the famous piece by E Curiel on 'progressive democracy' (published in March 1944) now reproduced in *Critica marxista*, *cit*, pp 29-38. The argument becomes inextricably confused when he says that 'we must examine the political line of the communist parties, assuming our aim is not merely to verify it on the basis of *tactical* considerations, but is to understand how the transition from the slogan "All power to the Soviet" to the slogan "All power to the CNL" is more than the expedient expression of political contingency, but represents the *historical conquest of twenty years of proletarian struggle!*'

Within the PCI, there was no lack of firm and courageous opposition, but it received no better than insolent replies. See, as a representative example, the article by Felice Platone, 'Vecchie e nuove vie della provocazione trotzkista' (in *La Rinascita*, 1954, n 4, p 89), in which the echo of serious criticisms can faintly be heard:

'... someone will always be found maintaining that democracy could never be any different from the variety which gave birth twenty-five years ago or thereabouts to fascism, and would of necessity be monopolised by the self-same social groups and strata

as before; and someone else will be found retorting that all struggle for democracy is in vain, and that we speak in vain of the unity and victory of the democratic forces'.

It is obvious that the positions which we glimpse between the lines merited serious replies, but instead the question is settled by recourse to the most vulgar insults:

'And such groupings, which are more at home in the underworld than in politics, and provide a base for old and new Trotskyites, night-club owners and clandestine gambling den operators, speculators in the black market and the heroic thieves of the night: such groupings perhaps represent a threat to the democratic workers' movement for national liberation, or are they rather just a problem for the police?'

51. Lelio Basso, 'Vent'anni perduti?' in *Problemi del socialismo*, 1960, no 11-12, pp 1286 *et seq.*
52. *Op cit.*, pp 257-258.
53. In *Verifica dei poteri*, *cit.*, p 136.
54. In *Commune*, no 23, July 1935, p 1263; quoted by Fortino, *op cit.*, p 136.
55. F Fortini, *op cit.*, pp 127-128.
56. *Op cit.*, p 255.
57. Letter from F Fortini to Leo Spitzer, January 1, 1956; reproduced in *Verifica dei poteri*, *cit.*, pp 177-178.
58. In *Bianco e Nero* XI, no 2, February 1950, pp 31-54.
59. In *Inchiesta sul neorealismo*, ed Carlo Bo, Rome, 1951, p 15.
60. Giuseppe Ferrara, *Il Nuovo cinema italiano*, Florence, 1957, pp 87-88.
61. Carlo Lizzani, *Storia del cinema italiano*, Florence, 1961, p 107.
62. 'Il "mito degli inizi" e la parabola di R Rossellini', in *Il Contemporaneo*, January 1964, no 68, p 42.
63. C Lizzani, *op cit.*, p 89.
64. Alberto Lattuada, 'Prefazione' in *Occhio Quadrato*, Corrente Edizioni 1941; reproduced in Carlo Lizzani, *op cit.*, p 390.
65. Carlo Lizzani, 'Infanzia del cinema italiano' in *Si gira*, no 3-4, April-May 1942; now in C Lizzani, *op cit.*, pp 399-402.
66. *Ibid.*
67. C Lizzani, *op cit.*, p 100.
68. M Sansone, *op cit.*, p 572. This view is supported by Persiani: 'In neo-realism evil has been definitively identified as a social question. . . . But it seems to me that there is another reason to ascribe particular ideals to the post-war Italian cinema: the presentiment, the virtual certainty that the individual would inevitably emerge triumphant from this constant and painful struggle against evil. . . . It would not therefore be wrong to describe the neo-realist cinema as essentially romantic: it is a kind of romanticism which celebrates the passions of its characters on a social plane, but nonetheless conserves the unmistakable element of all romanticism: the conflict between the individual and the irrational'. (D Persiani in *Lo Spettatore Italiano*, January 1953, p 16).
69. A Lattuada, 'Paghiamo i nostri debiti' in *Film d'oggi*, I, no 4, June 30, 1945. Now in Carlo Lizzani, *op cit.*, p 391.
70. The conception of the State as impartial and 'standing above classes' is the ornamentation of every theoretical 'discovery' of social democracy.
71. G P Dell'Acqua, 'Un'eredità difficile ma vincolante', in *Cinema 60*, V, no 44, August 1964, pp 3-13. The article, which is observant and accurate, repeats: 'Neo-realism echoed firstly, the concerns of that section of the

bourgeoisie which had tried, during the dictatorship, to maintain the values or rather the principles of the legal State and its concretisation in "elites" in the cultural field and in parts of the judiciary, the educational system and even the administration: already established under liberal rule, they were swept away by fascism. Secondly, since this defeat had aroused consciousness of the intrinsic weakness of these institutions, neo-realism also reflected the results of this critical experience, which it translated into a search for communication with the popular class movement'.

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72. Umberto Lenzi, 'Il montaggio nel cinema neorealista' in *Cinema della realtà*, ed Film Club Siena 'Bianco e nero' and the Centro Universitario Cinematografico, Siena, June 1955, pp 54-55.
73. *Il film nella battaglia delle idee*, Milan, 1954, p 154. Chiarini's comments refer to *Il comminò della speranza*, but I think it is quite legitimate to transfer them here: (1) because this is another Germi film, with a similar structure and content; (2) because what I am concerned with is the method employed, which at a certain level is independent from the particular film.
74. When he ventures into the South Germi always poses false alternatives, as for example when he counterposes the Northern petty bourgeois family to Southern inhibitions and the myth of honour.
75. A clear example is *Le mani sulla città* by F. Rosi.
76. 'Sull'origine e sulla determinazione del film neorealista' in *Servitù e grandezza del cinema*, Rome, April 1962, p 189.
77. *Ibid.*, p 191.
78. 'La sceneggiatura del film neorealista' in *Servitù . . . cit.*, p 193.
79. 'Studi sul neorealismo italiano' in *Servitù . . . cit.*, p 200.
80. From the preface to the book by Panfilo Colaprete, *Cinema amaro*, Florence, September 1955.
81. *Scrittori e popolo*, Rome, 1965, p 302.
82. 'Per una discussione sul film italiano' in *Bianco e Nero*, April 1948, p 12.
83. *Il nuovo cinema italiano*, *cit.*, p XIX.
84. *Il neorealismo italiano*, Parma, April 1956, p 115.
85. 'Bilancio del neorealismo italiano' in *Civiltà delle macchine*, 1958, no 1, pp 79-84.
86. *Ibid.*
87. *Ibid.*
88. *Ibid.*
89. *Ibid.* This opinion is confirmed by Rossellini, he writes in the preface to Rondi's book:
'We gazed at the ruins from which we had emerged. From the bottom of our hearts there came a deeply and sincerely felt need to find each other. Out of our moral stance, which impelled us to understand the *absurd tragedy* of which we were the survivors, neo-realism was born. It was a way of drawing man closer in a spirit of absolute love and solidarity. . . .'
90. *Ibid.*
91. *Il neorealismo italiano*, *cit.*, p 16.
92. *Ibid.*
93. *Ibid.*
94. 'Dieci anni dopo' in *Cinema della realtà*, *cit.*, p 26.
95. *Il nuovo cinema italiano*, *cit.*, pp 86-87.
96. *Ibid.*, p 92.
97. *Ibid.*, p 93.
98. *Ibid.*, p 150.
99. *Ibid.*, pp 98-99.
100. *Ibid.*, pp 245-246.

101. *Ibid*, pp 246-252.
102. *Ibid*, p 252.
103. 'Dieci anni dopo' *art cit*, p 28. The same verdict applies to P Raffa's humanist-social democratic theories ('Per una definizione rigorosa del neorealismo cinematografico' in *Nuova Corrente*, April 1958, pp 25-38). Neo-realism, according to Raffa, is 'the sign of a victory over both the a-social individualism of bourgeois culture, and the totalitarian socialisation of Russian socialism: a sign that is overwhelmingly confirmed by the facts now that western socialism is taking an initiative independently from the Soviet authorities'.
104. *Arte e tecnica del film*, Bari, 1962, p 181.
105. *Ibid*, p 188.
106. *Ibid*, p 197.
107. *Il film nella battaglia delle idee*, *cit*, p 85.
108. *Ibid*, p 88.
109. *Ibid*, p 90.
110. *Ibid*, p 91. There is a classic statement of this kind in another article by Chiarini, 'Avviso', in *Bianco e Nero*, March 1948, p 3: 'Cinema, good, real cinema, is moving to the left; but to a left without apparatuses or central committees, divisions and distinctions: the left which represents progress against conservatism, the motive force of history, and which poses a problem for immediate resolution: the problem of a better society, in which grief and tragedy will be redeemed, and all men will feel true brothers. It is significant that the furthest left among Italian directors in this sense is Rossellini, who, if I am not mistaken, belongs to Christian Democracy'.
111. *Ibid*, p 98.
112. *Ibid*, p 124.
113. *Ibid*, p 129.
114. *Arte e tecnica del film*, *cit*, p 185.
115. *Il film*, *cit*, p 136.
116. *Ibid*.
117. *Ibid*, p 137.
118. *Ibid*, pp 145-147.
119. Guido Oldrini, 'Problemi di teoria generale del neorealismo' in *Cinema. Libro Quinto*, Milan, 1965, p 52. Oldrini follows Aristarco, and his opinion can therefore be taken as 'authentic'.
120. *Esperienza culturale ed esperienza originale in Luchino Visconti in Rocco e i suoi fratelli*, ed G Aristarco and G Carancini, Capelli, 1960, p 19.
121. *Ibid*, p 21.
122. 'E realismo' in *Cinema nuovo*, 1954, no 55, pp 226-227.
123. *Cinema nuovo*, V, October 15, 1956, no 92, p 217. On this position, F Fortini has some apposite words (in *Verifica dei poteri*, *cit*, pp 219-220):
 'To say that stylistic renewal comes about with a renewal of content, and that this in turn is only the result of cultural change, can lead to two distinct errors: formalism in "content"; or stylising a mere trend or fashion . . . - and a proclamation of "cultural renewal" purely on the basis of ideological formulations. . . . There is obviously little trace of marxism in an act of renewal which prides itself on being revolutionary when it is objectively reformist, or aims to oppose to the supposed "mysticism" and "intuition" of the twentieth century no more than the "necessary minimum" of ideological nutrient, without locating it in what Lukacs calls the "great problems of human progress"'.

Editor's Notes

[1] Benedetto Croce (1866-1952), neo-Hegelian philosopher, historian, critic, and on occasion politician, was the dominant figure in Italian intellectual life for half a century. His interpretation of modern Italian history (the Risorgimento, fascism, etc), his aesthetic views, his conception of the function of the intellectual, his ideas on the relation between politics and culture – all of these were, and to a great extent still are, therefore more or less obligatory points of reference for all subsequent historical and cultural writing in Italy. This has even been true as far as Marxist authors are concerned, for whom, beginning with Gramsci (see note 32 below), he has played a somewhat similar role to that of Dühring for Engels. Ironically, in view of his extremely ambiguous relation to fascism (he was Minister of Education in Mussolini's first cabinet; subsequently withdrew into a kind of Olympian retreat, affronted by fascist philistinism but at the same time utterly aloof from any form of anti-fascist political action), he has often been depicted by liberals in Britain and the United States as a symbol of resistance to fascism – the precise opposite of the truth.

[2] Carlo Lizzani, born 1922, film critic and neo-realist director, main films: *Achtung! Banditi!*, *Cronache di poveri amanti* (1953), *Lo svitato* (1956), *La muraglia cinese* (1958), *Il gobbo* (1960), *Il processo di Verona* (1962), *La vita agra* (1964).

[3] Anti-fascist activity never ceased in Italy from Mussolini's 'March on Rome' in 1922 through his smashing of all legal opposition in 1926 to his deposition in 1943, his re-emergence as a Nazi puppet in North Italy and his final fall and death in 1945. Although only the communists maintained any kind of underground organisation through this period, and that at times was hardly more than vestigial, nevertheless there was a steady stream of young men and women – marxists, social-democrats, liberals and Catholics – whose individual opposition led them either into exile or into *confino* (banishment to some remote village or island). The Resistance proper developed above all in the last three years of the war, in central and northern Italy. It involved military activity on a mass scale, with operations by communist, socialist and Catholic military units holding down large numbers of German troops. The apparent culmination of the Resistance was the formation of the post-war Popular Front coalition government, which included Christian Democrats, Communists and Socialists. Although the reality behind this front became clear for all to see in 1948, when the Communists and Socialists were thrown out of the coalition, the inter-class alliance of the Resistance and the post-war Popular Front government remains a pre-eminent symbol for the Communist Party to this day.

[4] The Risorgimento is the name commonly given to the process of national unification whereby Italy came into existence as a single entity for the first time since the fall of the Roman empire (with the exception of a brief period under Napoleonic occupation). The key

phases in the Risorgimento were the abortive local risings of 1820, 1830-1 and 1834; the generalised but ultimately unsuccessful anti-Austrian risings throughout north and central Italy in 1848-9; the successful formation of a united Italian state in 1859-61, based on Piedmont and backed by France (Lombardy was ceded by Austria after her military defeat of 1859, the Central Italian states with the exception of the Papal state rallied in 1860 and in the same year Garibaldi's expedition to Sicily led to the toppling of the Bourbon dynasty in Naples and the South); the incorporation of the Veneto in 1866 and finally of Rome itself in 1870. What is here termed the 'first' Risorgimento refers, presumably, to the 1848-9 risings.

- [5] Carlo Cattaneo (1801-69), sometimes called the first Italian positivist, played a key role in the Milan insurrection of 1848, and subsequently became a prominent republican opponent of the Piedmontese monarchy which occupied the throne of the newly created Kingdom of Italy.
- [6] Giuseppe Ferrari (1811-76), philosopher and historian. Living in exile in France from 1838 to 1859, he wrote various works putting forward a democratic-republican, federalist point of view. Although he did not play the same active role as Cattaneo or Pisacane in the events of 1848-9, like them he can be seen as an ideologue of that bourgeois republican phase of the Risorgimento which was to be submerged in the final process of national reunification under the Piedmontese monarchy.
- [7] Carlo Pisacane (1818-57) was a prominent Risorgimento man of action and military theorist, notable for his advocacy of the creation of peasant armies and a 'war of national insurrection'. He played an important role in the short-lived 'Rome Republic' of 1849. Committed suicide in 1857 after the failure of a military expedition against the Bourbons in Naples.
- [8] Antonio Giolitti (born 1915), socialist (PSI) politician and economist, held ministerial posts in a number of Centre-Left governments in the sixties.
- [9] *Il Politecnico* was a magazine started by the novelist Elio Vittorini after the war which tried to introduce a new open thematic into communist culture. It folded when the PCI withdrew support and even tolerance for the attempt.
- [10] Italo Calvino (born 1923), novelist, author of *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*, *Il visconte dimezzato*, *L'entrata in guerra*, *L'ora dell'uomo*, *Il barone rampante*, *La formica argentina*.
- [11] *l'Unità*, daily organ of the Italian Communist Party.
- [12] Cesare Pavese (1908-50), novelist and poet, his works – widely translated – include *Il compagno*, *Dialoghi con Leucò*, *Prima che il gallo canti*, *La bella estate*, *La luna e i falò*, and a diary which he kept right up to the time of his suicide, *Il mestiere di vivere*.
- [13] Norberto Bobbio (born 1909), philosopher and jurist, his works include *Studi sulla teoria generale del diritto* and *Politica e cultura*. Translator of Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*.
- [14] Palmiro Togliatti (1893-1964) was the main leader of the Italian Communist Party from the arrest of Gramsci in 1926 until his own death in 1964.
- [15] Franco Fortini (born 1917), poet, critic, essayist who contributed to and was important in the major post-war Italian cultural journals – *Il Politecnico*, *Officina*, *Ragionamenti*, *Quaderni Rossi*, *Quaderni Piacentini*. An important left theorist of Italian culture, Fortini's major works include *Foglio di via e altri versi* (1946);

Agonia di Natale (1948); *Asia Maggiore, viaggio nella Cina* (1956); *Dieci Inverni, contributo ad un discorso Socialista* (1957); *Poesia ed errore* (1959); *Una volta per sempre* (1963); *Tre test per film* (1963); *Sere in Valdossola* (1963); *Profezie e realtà del nostro tempo* (1964); *Verifica dei poteri* (1965); *L'ospite ingratto* (1966); *I cani del Sinai* (1967); *Ventiquattro Voci* (1968). Screen will be publishing in its next number an article of Fortini's on Bertolt Brecht collected in *Verifica dei poteri*. The article relates to the position of the writer during the period of fascism and the Popular Front and therefore connects up with the Goffredo Fofi article previously published (*Screen* v 13 n 4) and the present text by Mario Cannella.

- [16] Eugenio Garin (born 1909), philosopher and historian of ideas, his works include *Cronache di filosofia italiana* (1900-43), *La cultura italiana tra '800 e '900* and a number of works on Medieval, humanistic and Renaissance culture.
- [17] Ivanoe Bonomi (1873-1952), at first a reformist socialist, expelled from the PSI in 1912, he remained in parliament as an independent centrist politician and was prime minister 1921-2, just before Mussolini's rise to power.
- [18] ie the former followers of Giovanni Giolitti (1842-1928), who dominated Italian parliamentary politics between 1900 and 1914 and was prime minister in 1892-3, 1906-9, 1911-14 and 1920-21 (when he encouraged the fascists as a counter-balancing force to the socialists).
- [19] Lelio Basso (born 1903) first became active in the PSI in the years following the First World War and remained one of its most prominent leaders until he left it in 1964 together with most of the party's left wing to form the PSIUP, whose titular head – though not effective leader – he became, until he resigned his post shortly before the party fragmented at its 1973 Congress. He is editor of the theoretical journal *Problemi del Socialismo*.
- [20] Francesco Crispi (1818-1901) first became prominent for his role in Garibaldi's 1860 expedition to Sicily, after unification of Italy a parliamentary deputy of the Left, in 1865 broke with Mazzini and rallied to the monarchy. Crispi was Minister of Interior and Prime Minister on various occasions between 1876 and 1896, and was the most consistent advocate of Italian colonial expansion, notably into Ethiopia.
- [21] Agostino Depretis (1813-87) was at first a Mazzinian; later, in Sicily with Garibaldi, he was in fact working for Cavour and the Piedmontese monarchy. In 1876 he became the first 'Left' prime minister, and dominated Italian parliamentary life until his death. He chose his ministers from both sides of parliament, in the process which became known as transformism.
- [22] *Calligrafismo*, term first used in 1922 by G. A. Borgese to refer, ironically, to writers who strove for stylistic elegance without bothering too much about content. Became extremely common subsequently, with the rise of neo-realism, especially in the novel, to indicate the attitude and taste to which neo-realism was opposed. More or less a synonym for formalism.
- [23] Mario Camerini (born 1895), from 1920 scriptwriter – assistant to Genina (see note 34 below). Became director, main films *Gli uomini, che mascalzoni!* (1932), *Il capello a tre punte* (1934), *Darò un milione* (1935), *Ma non è una cosa seria* (1936), *Il signor Max* (1937), *Una romantica avventura*, *I promessi sposi* (1940), *La figlia del capitano* (1947), *Ulisse* (1953), *Suor Letizia* (1957).
- [24] Alessandro Blasetti (born 1900), film director (also critic, stage

producer and actor). Main films *Sole* (1929), *Nerone, Resurrectio* (1930), *Palio* (1932), *1860, Vecchia guardia* (1934), *Aldebaran* (1935), *Ettore Fieramasca* (1938), *Un'avventura di Salvator Rosa* (1940), *La corona di ferro*, *La cena delle beffe* (1941), *Quattro passi fra le nuvole* (1942), *Un giorno nella vita* (1946), *Fabiolo* (1948), *Prima comunione* (1950), *Altri tempi* (1952).

[25] Pietro Germi (born 1914), film director. Main films *Il testimone* (1946), *Gioventù perduta* (1947), *In nome della legge* (1949), *Il cammino della speranza* (1950), *Il ferrovieri* (1956), *L'uomo di paglia* (1957), *Un maledetto imbroglio* (1959), *Divorzio all'italiana* (1961), *Sedotta e abbandonata* (1963).

[26] Alberto Lattuada (born 1914), film director, main films *Il bandito* (1946), *Senza pietà* (1948), *Luci del varietà* (with Fellini, 1950), *Anna* (1951), *Il cappotto* (1952), *La lupa* (1953), *Guendalina* (1957), *La tempesta* (1958), *I dolci inganni, Lettere di una novizia* (1960), *L'imprevisto* (1961), *La steppa* (1962), *Mafioso* (1963).

[27] Piero Calamandrei (1889-1956), jurist, politician and writer prominent in the Resistance and the immediate post-war period, above all through the journal *Il Ponte* which he founded in 1944. *Il Ponte* was to create a bridge to the 'best' elements of pre-fascist thought and culture. Its contributors ranged across the whole spectrum of anti-fascist writing, from 'progressive' Catholics like Jemolo (see following note) to communists and socialists.

[28] Leonardo Severi (born 1882), jurist, Minister of Public Education in the 1943 Badoglio government.

[29] Arturo Carlo Jemolo (born 1891), historian (especially of relations between Church and State in Italy), jurist and essayist, his works include *Chiesa e Stato in Italia negli ultimi cento anni, Italia tormentata, La politica dei partiti nel 1953*.

[30] Cesare Zavattini (born 1902), scriptwriter, worked on many of most important neo-realist films including *I bambini ci guardano, Sciuscia, Un giorno nella vita, Bicycle thieves, Umberto D, Darò un milione, Il testimone* etc, etc.

[31] Francesco Maselli (born 1930), director, main films *Gli sbandati* (1955), *La donna del giorno* (1956), *I delfini* (1960), *Gli indifferenti* (1963).

[32] Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) was the main leader of the Italian Communist Party from 1923 until his arrest and imprisonment in 1926. During his imprisonment he wrote extensively on history, intellectual life, philosophy, political theory, culture, etc, etc, and the publication of these writings after the Second World War, despite their extremely fragmentary and often gnomic character, has had an important impact on all Marxist and much non-Marxist thought in post-war Italy. He has, however, suffered greatly from pietistic over-simplification and distortion of his thought by the Communist Party, and equally from philistine attacks by left opponents of the Communist Party who have taken the latter's hagiographic image of Gramsci at face value.

[33] Mario Alicata (born 1918), prominent Italian communist deputy and journalist, a former editor of *l'Unità*.

[34] Augusto Genina (1892-1957), film director, numerous films from 1915 to 1955. His post-war films were *Cielo sulla palude* (1949), *L'edera* (1950), *Tre storie proibite* (1952), *Maddalena* (1954), *Frou-frou* (1955).

Christopher Williams

Andre Bazin's articles on Italian neo-realism¹ are centred around lengthy discussion of the following films: *Paisà*, *Europa '51*, *Viaggio in Italia* (Rossellini); *Bicycle Thieves*, *Umberto D*, *Gold of Naples* (de Sica); *La terra trema*, *Senso* (Visconti); *La Strada*, *Le notte di Cabiria* (Fellini). Other films by the same directors are also referred to, as are *Il cammino della speranza* (Pietro Germi), *Cielo sulla palude* (Augusto Genina), *Due soldi d'esperanza* and *Romeo and Juliet* (Renato Castellani), and the multi-authored *L'Amore in Città*. The two films extraneous to the movement which Bazin evokes most frequently for purposes of comparison are *Citizen Kane* and Georges Rouquier's *Farrebique*. The articles first appeared in the period 1948-1957. The present text is a re-reading of these articles and an attempt to question their contradictions and gaps.

I

' In a world already and again obsessed by terror and hate, in which reality is almost never loved for its own sake, but only refused or defended as a political sign, the Italian cinema is certainly the only one which preserves, in the very midst of the period it depicts, a revolutionary humanism. (. .). The recent Italian films are at the very least pre-revolutionary. They all refuse, implicitly or explicitly, through humour, satire or poetry, the social reality they make use of, but they know better, even when taking up the most clear positions, than ever to treat this reality as a means to an end. Condemning it does not oblige them to bad faith. They do not forget that the world is, quite simply, before it is something that can be condemned. It's stupid and perhaps as naive as Beaumarchais' praise of the tears of melodrama, but tell me if you don't, coming out of an Italian film, feel better, if you don't want to change the order of things, but preferably by persuading people, at least those who can be persuaded and whom only blindness, prejudice or bad luck have led to do evil to their fellow men? '²

There is a real world out there: Italian neo-realism is the triumph of the cinema's ineluctable march through primitive aspirations and technical developments to a re-possession of it. A re-possession through love or friendly persuasion, in which there are no villains and revolutionary humanism is open to all. Bazin does not confront the problem of how a film might simultaneously refuse reality and yet be an expression of love for it. But on the revolutionary front there are no doubts:

'Bicycle Thieves is certainly the only valid Communist film of the last decade, precisely because it keeps a meaning even if you abstract its social significance'.³ It is superior to a propaganda film because it shows only that the worker *may* not find his bike again, whereas the propaganda film would insist that he cannot find it. De Sica has an inexhaustible love for his characters,⁴ which happily fits well with a basic characteristic of the medium: 'I believe that more than any other art the cinema is the art proper to love itself'.⁵ De Sica (and with him neo-realism in general) joins a tradition of cinematic lovers of humanity comprising Flaherty, Renoir, Vigo and Chaplin. This love is equated with poetry: 'Poetry is only the active and creative form of love, its projection into the world'.⁶

Three years later, confronted with *Gold of Naples*, Bazin modified his position about de Sica. 'I myself, I think, have written rather naively about de Sica's kind heart. It is true that his films run over with sentimentality. But he will be much forgiven for the authenticity of his cruelty'.⁷ At this stage he was seeing de Sica as essentially a theatrical talent, the dimension of 'active sympathy which I shall call *goodness*'⁸ being provided by his collaborator Zavattini. The torch of love had been passed over to Rossellini - 'but a love which is not sentimental and which one may call metaphysical'.⁹

Goodness, love, poetry, revolution, humanism: these, along with the concomitant problem of acceptance/non-acceptance of reality, are the ideological notions which underpin Bazin's thinking about neo-realism.

II

'Cinematographic styles can be grouped, though not in a hierarchy, in terms of the added reality they represent. We shall thus call *realist* any system of expression or narrative procedure tending to make more reality appear on the screen. Naturally, 'reality' must not be understood in terms of quantity. The same event, the same object is capable of several different representations. Each of them discards or retains some of the qualities that lead us to recognise the object on the screen, each of them introduces, to didactic or aesthetic ends, more or less corrosive abstractions which do not permit the original object to subsist in its entirety. At the end of this inevitable and necessary chemistry, an illusion reality made up of a complex of abstraction (black and white, plane surface), of conventions (the laws of montage for example) and of authentic reality has been substituted for the initial reality. It is a necessary illusion, but it leads rapidly to a loss of consciousness of reality itself, which is identified in the spectator's mind with its cinematographic representation'.¹⁰

No quotation could be more representative of Bazin's integral

realism. He notes the presence of abstraction and convention while firmly subordinating their action to the production of illusions of reality. Neo-realism is the illustration of this subordination:

‘... The number and types of shots in *Bicycle Thieves* do not distinguish it perceptibly from an ordinary film. But the choice of shots tends only to valorise the event with the maximum of limpidity while minimising the amount of interference from the style.’¹¹

Mise-en-scène can thus be said to have disappeared:

‘If the event is sufficient unto itself without the *metteur en scène* needing to shed any further light on it through camera angles or prejudices, it is precisely because it has attained that perfect luminosity which allows art to unmask a nature which at last resembles art.’¹²

Neo-realism ‘knows only immanence. Only from the aspect, from the pure appearance of people and the world does it intend to deduce, *a posteriori*, the lessons they conceal. It is a phenomenology.’¹³

Like de Sica, Rossellini is interested in

‘repudiating the categories of acting and dramatic expression in order to force reality to yield up its meaning from the starting-point of its appearances only.’¹⁴

As the 1950’s wore on, and various factors, including Rossellini’s style, the appearance of ‘historical neo-realist movies’ like *Romeo and Juliet*, and the decline of the movement generally seem to have made it impossible for the purity of the phenomenological position to be maintained, it was modified to an altogether more general type of humanism:

‘More deeply than a formal contemporaneity of subjects, (neo-realism) is a way of seeing or representing men and events as contemporary, that is to say, with the maximum of presence and life.’¹⁵

The choice of quotations above is not meant to imply that Bazin was unaware of questions of style or of the operation of what the Metzian system so influenced by him was later to call cinematic codes. It is, however, meant to make it clear that Bazin assigned these questions a subordinate role wherever the interests of realism (and, by extension, of the cinema) were at stake. Reality may not have been a means to an end; technique emphatically was. Compared with ‘The Evolution of Film Language’¹⁶ or ‘William Wyler, or the Jansenist of *Mise-en-scène*’,¹⁷ the essays on neo-realism are fairly innocent of any interest in technique. Only

Rossellini pushes Bazin in that direction. What is perhaps more important is that any work on the processes of generation of meaning is effectively short-circuited by Bazin's teleological system. The domination of the codes of analogy means that meaning is always there, waiting to be revealed; it cannot be constructed, nor emerge from the clashes of different systems. It would seem to be lying in wait for the active (but humble) film-maker to 'make it leap out' with the aid of a camera 'at the level of the human eye'. No amount of reference to 'phenomenology' or 'revolutionary humanism' can conceal the fundamentally passive, unquestioning nature of such a system. There is an (unconsciously) ironical reflection on the consequences of this limitation in one of the late essays on Fellini:

'It is all very much as though, having reached this level of interest in appearances, we now perceive the characters, not among the objects any more, but, by transparency, through them. I mean to say that without our noticing it the world has passed from signification to analogy, then from analogy to an identification with the supernatural. I am sorry about this equivocal word, which the reader may replace as he wishes with poetry [again! – CW], surrealism, magic or any other term expressing the secret concordance of things with an invisible double of which they are only a sort of outline sketch.'¹⁸

The property of the cinema is to reflect reality, and not even Rossellini's style, imposing a degree of distance and a different type of consciousness, can make any difference to that. 'Neo-realism is a global description of reality by a global consciousness. . . . It looks on reality as a bloc, not incomprehensible certainly, but indissociably one'.¹⁹

III

But:

'In my view, it will be not the least merit of the Italian cinema that it has reminded us once again that there has been no "realism" in art that has not basically been profoundly "aesthetic".'²⁰

As noted above, the essence of Bazin's ideas about aesthetics are contained in the texts on Welles and Wyler, and most of the points relating to specific techniques in *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?* volume 4 are held in the firmly governing grip of realism. If this is an aesthetic, it is one that has effectively abdicated:

'The cinema has reached a stage of its evolution in which form no longer determines anything, in which the language offers no more resistance, and, inversely, suggests no effect of style as such to the artist using it.'²¹ (On *La Strada*, 1955).

But in spite of the apparently categorical nature of this position, it is in the area of aesthetics that the most interesting cracks in Bazin's realist system begin to appear.²² They arise in the first place over Rossellini:

65

' Rossellini's *mise-en-scène* interposes itself between its material and us, not of course like an artificial obstacle, but like an uncrossable ontological distance, a congenital infirmity of being which is translated aesthetically in terms of space, forms and structures of *mise-en-scène*. Because one is aware of it as a lack, a refusal, an escape from things, and thus finally as a kind of pain, it is easier for us to be consciously aware of it, easier to reduce it to a formal method.'²³

Bazin attributes this otherness of Rossellini's style to an otherness in his thematic subject-matter: 'a desperate consciousness of the impossibility of communication between people'.²⁴ But there can be no doubt that once there is such a difference in style, the edifice of integral realism begins to collapse.²⁵ Bazin joins in the destruction himself: *Europa '51* ' is a film which must be understood and judged on the basis of its *mise-en-scène*'.²⁶ Rossellini seems to pare down more and more, to style with a painful but pitiless rigour, in short to rediscover the classicism of dramatic expression through acting and selection' . . .²⁷ 'Through the agency of style, reality links up again with art'.²⁸

And in fact, Bazin's discourse on neo-realism contains quite frequent, if unemphasised, references to the notions of art, style and conventions. They constitute a kind of undeveloped and potentially contradictory sub-text:

' The documentary matter of Italian neo-realism only accedes to the dignity of art insofar as it rediscovered in itself the great dramatic archetypes which found and will always find our participation.'²⁹

' Art tries to transcend reality, not to reproduce it. Even more so the cinema, because of its technical realism.'³⁰

And after *Europa '51* ' neo-realism is capable of restoring, not in but through reality, the conventions necessary to style'.³¹ Several of Rossellini's films ' make one think of a sketch, the stroke indicates but does not paint'.³² These perceptions are not followed up. Nor are the references to narrative structure, perhaps because they too contain a hidden depth-charge liable to destroy the edifice, or at the very least turn the author away from the celebration of Italian neo-realism.

IV

' The unit of cinematic narrative in *Paisà* is not the "shot", which is an abstract point of view on a reality which is being

66 analysed, but the "fact"'.³³ This short sentence contains a double mystification. Firstly, the 'fact' is not a category that has any status inside artistic discourse. Secondly, while it may be said that classical editing does in some sense analyse reality, one needs to question in what sense this analysis, which as Bazin says, stands in some kind of relationship to the narrative, dramatic or psychological needs of the film, can properly be called abstract. There are plenty of narrative films which use classical, analytical or 'invisible' editing and which can still be called 'realist' within the finally all-embracing sense Bazin gives to the term. If they reach a degree of abstraction, it is in conjunction with the operation, within the film-text, of other cinematic and extra-cinematic codes. The neo-realist films themselves, like those of Welles and Wyler which Bazin also admired, are far more edited than Bazin's theory could allow. *Bicycle Thieves* has cuts and dissolves; it also has a narrative structure, a hero, an organisation of events (to use a less-loaded term than Bazin's 'facts'). It is a loss for film criticism that Bazin's undoubted interest in aesthetics was perpetually over-ridden by his realist ideology and his fetishised enthusiasm for certain techniques. If technique can be thought, it must be thought on a different level than the one Bazin proposes. For him, even the narrative gaps of Rossellini are a part of realism:

'It is perhaps especially the structure of the narrative which is most radically upset (by neo-realism). It must now respect the true duration of the event. The cuts that logic demands can be at most only descriptive; the construction of the film must in no way add anything to the subsisting reality. If it is part of the meaning of the film as with Rossellini, it is because the emptinesses, the gaps, the parts of the event that we are not told about are themselves of a concrete nature: stones which are missing from the building. It is the same in life: we do not know everything about what happens to other people. Ellipsis in classic montage is an effect of style: in Rossellini it is a lacuna in reality or rather in the knowledge that we have of it which is by nature limited.'³⁴

Again, a difference in practice has been reduced to a metaphysical similarity. And the differences are important: since, while it is now impossible to see the narrative structures of *Bicycle Thieves* or *Umberto D* as radically upsetting anything, the stylistic procedures of *Stromboli* and *Viaggio in Italia* continue to pose interesting problems.

'The aesthetic of *La terra trema* must be utilised to dramatic ends if it is to help in the evolution of the cinema. Otherwise it is only a splendid parking-lot.'³⁵ In the majority of the other neo-realist films he wrote about, Bazin is perpetually celebrating the disappearance of dramatic modes of expression and corrosive (?) effects of abstraction (?), and their replacement by a supposedly non-manipulative practice of transparency. But no sooner kicked

'The art of Rossellini consists of knowing how to give facts their densest and most elegant structure simultaneously; not the most gracious structure but the sharpest, most direct or most trenchant one. With him, neo-realism rediscovers naturally the style and the resources of abstraction. Respecting the real does not mean that you have to pile up appearances, on the contrary it means stripping it of everything that is not essential, it means attaining totality in simplicity. Rossellini's art seems linear and melodic. It is true that several of his films make one think of a sketch, the stroke indicates but does not paint.'³²

If we can still rediscover another Bazin, the critic who wrote meaningfully of the heterogeneity of the cinema, who also studied the historical meanings and development of the Western³⁶ and the relationships between theatre and cinema,³⁷ the brutal probability about his writings on neo-realism is that like so much writing done in the heat of a movement or the flush of a fashion they provide more insights into what may well be a perennial or recurrent way of looking at the cinema than knowledge about it. Only an historical/ideological reading could generate much meaning from them now.

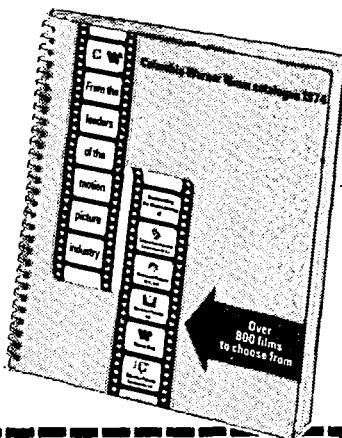
Notes

1. Collected in *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?* volume 4, Editions du Cerf, Paris, 1962. Seven of these essays appear in English in *What is Cinema?* volume 2, University of California Press, 1971. As the English translation is not altogether satisfactory, I have sometimes amended it in the course of this text. In the references below, *What is Cinema?* is coded *W*, *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?* is coded *Q*.
2. *W* v 2, pp 20-21; *Q* v 4, pp 15-16.
3. *W* v 2, p 51; *Q* v 4, p 49 [Bazin's italics].
4. *W* v 2, p 69; *Q* v 4, p 81.
5. *W* v 2, p 72; *Q* v 4, p 83.
6. *W* v 2, p 74; *Q* v 4, p 86.
7. *Q* v 4, p 111.
8. *Q* v 4, p 116.
9. *ibid.*
10. *W* v 2, p 27; *Q* v 4, p 22.
11. *W* v 2, p 57; *Q* v 4, p 57.
12. *W* v 2, pp 57-58; *Q* v 4, p 57.
13. *W* v 2, pp 64-65; *Q* v 2, p 76.
14. *Q* v 4, p 98.
15. *Q* v 4, p 102.
16. In ed Peter Graham, *The New Wave*, Secker and Warburg, 1968, pp 25-51; *W* v 1, pp 23-40 (with unacknowledged cuts); *Q* v 1, pp 131-148.
17. *Q* v 1, pp 149-173.
18. *W* v 2, p 88; *Q* v 4, p 139. The metaphor may be acceptable for magic, but is strictly ridiculous applied to poetry or surrealism
19. *W* v 2, p 97; *Q* v 4, p 154.

68 20. W v 2, p 25; Q v 4, pp 19-20.
 21. Q v 4, p 122.
 22. Insofar, that is, as it is possible for there to be cracks in a totally self-Confirming and self-fulfilling system.
 23. W v 2, pp 62-63; Q v 4, pp 74-75.
 24. W v 2, p 62; Q v 4, p 74.
 25. This tedious metaphor is suggested, perhaps pre-determined, by Bazin's fondness for metaphors to do with bricks, stones, buildings, etc.
 26. Q v 4, p 98.
 27. *ibid.*
 28. Q v 4, p 99.
 29. Q v 4, p 66.
 30. Q v 4, p 69.
 31. Q v 4, p 102.
 32. W v 2, p 101; Q v 4, pp 159-160.
 33. W v 2, p 37; Q v 4, p 33.
 34. W v 2, pp 65-66; Q v 4, pp 77-78.
 35. W v 2, p 45; Q v 4, p 43.
 36. W v 2, pp 140-157; Q v 3, pp 133-166.
 37. W v 1, pp 76-124; Q v 2, pp 69-118.

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Rossellini interviewed by Mario Verdone

I met Roberto Rossellini in a break in the making of *Europa '51* at the studios in Via della Vasca Navale. A scriptwriter was at work on the lines Ingrid Bergman was about to pronounce. The walls of the set were freshly painted: it was not long since they had been made, as Rossellini had changed his original idea of shooting in a real interior. No-one knew what scenes would be shot the next day. Rossellini himself had not decided. The producer was not there — he might well never have come throughout the making of the film. Ingrid Bergman was sitting to one side on a wooden bench, wearing a fur coat and knitting. When the order to shoot came her expression changed effortlessly, spontaneously and with complete conviction, and she threw herself into the part as only great actors can. The scene was a hospital ward, and on the director's instructions his assistant had arranged movements for white-clad extras, but when Rossellini arrived he had everything changed, in one of those sudden decisions with which he characteristically throws out every plan or arrangement. A technician who was waiting to speak to him pointed out to me that however bewildering these preparations seemed, they were in a sense quite normal: 'In this film all that counts is the director's orders, what he decides spontaneously, and it doesn't matter what we think. That's what really makes a Rossellini film.'

I had already learned enough to make a first attempt to sum up the man who had made *Roma, città aperta*. But I was able to form a clearer idea of him, as a director and as a man, after the discussions we had that day and later on. Though I knew him only through his films, he answered my questions with complete sincerity, as if confiding in a friend.

The subject I intended to write about was 'The poetic world of Rossellini', piecing it together through question and answer and observation. Rossellini cordially agreed to take part in this exercise in criticism and self-criticism, an exercise I proposed to base on the actual facts.

Would you claim to be the father of Italian neo-realism?

I leave it to other people to judge whether what is called neo-realism made a greater impression on the world through *Roma, città aperta*. I myself would place the birth of neo-realism earlier, especially in some fictionalised war documentaries, which I contributed to with *La nave bianca*. Then came the real war films, like *Luciano Serra pilota*, in which I worked on the scenario, and some I directed like *Uomo dalla croce*; but above all there were

70 some minor films like *Avanti c'è posto*, *Ultima Carrozzella* and *Campo dei Fiori*, in which what might be called the formula of neo-realism began to emerge as the spontaneous creation of the actors, especially Anna Magnani and Aldo Fabrizi. It's undeniably the case that these actors were the first to bring neo-realism to life – in the music-hall turns with strong men or Roman ballads, performed on nothing but a mat and to the accompaniment of a single guitar: in the way Magnani thought them up, or in the figure Fabrizi cut on the boards of a some local theatre, these films at moments gave a real foretaste of neo-realism. Neo-realism arose unconsciously as dialectical film-making, and then acquired a conscious life in the heat of the human and social problems of wartime and the post-war years. And speaking of dialectical film-making, we should make some reference historically to the less immediate precursors, namely Blasetti with his 'character' film, *1860*, and Camerini, with films like *Uomini che mascalzon!*

But historical precedents aside, Italian post-war films have a certain air of realism which would have been quite inconceivable before the war. Can you give a definition of it?

I'm a film-maker, not an aesthete, and I don't think I can give an exact definition of realism. All I can say is what I feel about it and what ideas I've formed about it. Perhaps someone else would be able to explain it better.

It involves a greater interest in individuals. Modern man feels a need to tell of things as they are, to take account of reality in an uncompromisingly concrete way, which goes with today's interest in statistics and scientific results. Neo-realism is also a response to the genuine need to see men for what they are, with humility and without recourse to fabricating the exceptional; it means an awareness that the exceptional is arrived at through the investigation of reality. Lastly, it's an urge for self-clarification, an urge not to ignore reality whatever it may be.

This is why I have tried in my films to reach an understanding of things, and give them their true value. It's not something easy or lightly undertaken, but a highly ambitious project, because to give anything its true value means grasping its real universal meaning.

You give a clear meaning for the term neo-realism – or more simply realism – but do you think that everyone who discusses it or works on it is as clear?

I think there is still some confusion about the term 'realism' even after all these years of realist films. Some people still think of realism as something external, as a way out into the fresh air, not as the contemplation of poverty and misery. To me realism is simply the artistic form of truth. If you re-establish truth you give it expression. If it's a dead truth, you feel it is false, it is not

truly expressed. With my views of course I cannot accept the 'entertainment' film, as the term is understood in some business circles, especially outside Europe. Some such films may be partially acceptable, to the extent that they are capable of giving partial expression to reality.

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What object does a realist film have that you would counterpose to the usual kind of 'entertainment' films?

The realist film has the 'world' as its living object, not the telling of a story. What it has to say is not fixed in advance, because it arises of its own accord. It has no love for the superfluous and the spectacular, and rejects these, going instead to the root of things. It does not stop at surface appearances, but seeks out the most subtle strands of the soul. It rejects formulae and doesn't pander to its audience, but seeks out the inner motives in each of us.

What other characteristics do you think a realist film has?

To put it briefly, it poses problems, poses them to itself as well. An American paper wrote an attack on my film *Il Miracolo* saying that the cinema is for entertainment and ought not to raise problems. But for me a realist film is precisely one which tries to make people think.

In the post-war period we were faced by this task, and none of us wanted to make what you might call an 'entertainment' film. What mattered to us was the investigation of reality, forming a relationship with reality. For the first so-called 'neo-realist' Italian directors it was undoubtedly a genuine heartfelt act. Then after the real innovators came the popularisers - who were perhaps even more important, as they spread neo-realism everywhere, and possibly with greater clarity. They didn't have to change anything and were perhaps better able to express themselves, making neo-realism more widely understood. But then deviations and distortions crept in, with fatal consequences. But by this time neo-realism had accomplished the main part of its work.

Do you think you have remained faithful in all your films to this concept of realism as you've now spelt it out?

If I have been faithful to it it has been spontaneously and without effort on my part. I don't think that one should preserve one's consistency at any price. Anyone who does so isn't far from being mad. In so far as I have respected certain principles in which I firmly believe, and which are very deep-rooted in me, then you can say that I have been consistent. And I think perhaps I have, since there is a single line you can trace through all my various works - the documentaries, the early war films, the post-war films and those of today. For example, it's undeniable that you find the same spirituality in *La nave bianca*, *Uomo dalla croce*.

72 Do you regard Francesco Giullare di Dio as a realistic film?

Of course – even in imagining what St Francis might be like as a man, I never abandoned reality, either as regards the events, which are strictly historical, or in any other visual aspect. The costumes, for example, are part of the 'reality'. They are so true to life that you scarcely notice them.

What I have tried to do in this film is to show a new side of St Francis, but not one which lies outside reality: to show a St Francis who is humanly and artistically credible in every sense.

What do you think have been the constant elements in your films?

I don't go by formulae and preconceptions. But looking back on my films, I certainly do find that there are things which have been constant features, recurring not in a planned way, but as I said, quite naturally – in particular, their human warmth. The realist film in itself has this quality. The sailors of the *La nave bianca* count as much as the people hiding in the hut at the end of *Uomo dalla croce*, the population of *Roma, città aperta*, the partisans of *Paisà* or the monks in *Giullare*.

La nave bianca is such a film – from the first scene, with the sailors' letters to their sweethearts, to the battle itself and then the wounded going to Mass or playing and singing. It also shows the ruthless cruelty of the machine; and the unheroic side of men living on a battleship, acting almost in the dark, surrounded by measuring instruments, protractors and steering-wheels – a side of them which appears unlyrical and unheroic, and yet is overwhelmingly heroic.

Again, there is the *documentary* style of observation and analysis, which I learned in my first shorts – *Fantasia sottomarina*, *Ruscello di Ripasottile*, *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* – and took up again in *Paisà* and in *Germania anno zero* and *Stromboli*.

I constantly come back, even in the strictest documentary forms, to *imagination*, because one part of man tends towards the concrete, and the other to the use of the imagination, and the first must not be allowed to suffocate the second. This is why you find fantasy at work in *Il Miracolo*, *La Macchina ammazzacattivi* and *Paisà*, as well as in *Giullare*, with the rain at the beginning, the young monk being knocked about by the troops, and Saint Clare standing by the hut. Even the finale in the snow was meant to have an air of fantasy.

And then again there is the religious quality – I don't mean the invocation of divine authority by the woman in the finale of *Stromboli*, so much as the themes I was dealing with even ten years ago.

Do you think then that this human warmth has always been a characteristic of your work?

I definitely began by stressing this above all. The war itself was an impulse to me: war is a heartfelt experience. If then I moved on from this to the discovery of personality and a deeper study of character, as with the child in *Germania anno zero* or the woman running away in *Stromboli*, this was part of my natural evolution as a director.

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*Is it true to say that in your films there is often a break between a particularly good episode like the scene with the child running through the city in *Germania anno zero*, and other parts which are inexplicably left incomplete or at least much more hastily sketched in?*

That's right. As a matter of fact every film I make interests me for a particular scene, perhaps for a finale I already have in mind. In every film I see on the one hand the narrative episodes – such as the first part of *Germania anno zero*, or the scene from *Europa '51* that you just saw me shooting – and on the other the *event*. My sole concern is to reach that *event*. In the other narrative episodes I feel myself hesitating, alienated, absent.

I don't deny that this is a weakness on my part, but I must confess that scenes which are not of key importance weary me, and make me feel quite helpless. I only feel sure of myself at the decisive moment. *Germania anno zero*, to tell the truth, was conceived specifically for the scene with the child wandering on his own through the ruins. The whole of the preceding part held no interest at all for me. It too was thought up around the scene with the cans of milk. And when I made *Paisà* I had in mind the last part with the corpses floating on the water, slowly being carried down the River Po with labels bearing the word 'Partisan' on them. The river had those corpses in it for months. Often several would be found on the same day.

Do you get inspiration when you're writing the scenario or when you're making the film? Do you believe in having a fixed scenario that can't be altered or rejected?

In the case of a film purely for entertainment, it may be right to have a fixed scenario. For realistic cinema of the kind Italy has produced, trying to find the truth and raising problems, you can't use the same criteria. Here inspiration plays the main part – it's not the fixed script that counts, but the film itself. An author writes a sentence or a page, then crosses it out. A painter uses a red, then paints it out with green. Why shouldn't I be able to cross things out too, to remake and replace film? This is why I don't think you can have a fixed scenario. If I thought you could, I would want to be known as a script writer, not a director. But I'm not a script writer. I make films.

I think for a long time about the theme of any film I make. A scenario is written, because it would be crazy to try to improvise

74 everything at the last minute. But the scenes, the dialogue and the scenography are adjusted from day to day. This is the place of inspiration in the pre-arranged order of the film. You make your preparations, get everything ready: and I might say that it's only then, for me, that the most difficult and exhausting part of making a film actually starts.

What contribution do you think is made by the people who make up the company on a film?

They are the means to an end. A director has them at his disposal like the books in a library. It's up to him to judge what's of use and what's not. The very act of choosing is a part of expressing himself. When a director knows his collaborators thoroughly, and knows what he can get out of them, it's as if he expresses himself through them.

From the time of my first documentaries I have been lucky enough to have a composer I get along with exceptionally well: my brother. I discussed my first attempts at film-making with him and we tried to bring the picture and the music together in the most harmonious way possible.

I have worked with some marvellous actors: Marcello Pagliero and Anna Magnani, Aldo Fabrizi and Ingrid Bergman, but also real sailors and partisans, monks and fishermen. It is to them, the actors and extras, that a large part of the success of my films is due. And since I've mentioned Fabrizi, I must make it clear that it was I who wanted him to play the grotesque character in *Giullare* which there has been so much argument about, and I assume full responsibility for it.

You admit that you like films with short episodes, like those in Paisà or Giullare, the two from Amore (Voce umana and Il miracolo) or Invidia (from Colette's Chatte, and forming a section of I sette peccati capitali) — and even the episodes in La nave bianca (in the bunk-room, the battle, the white ship), Germania anno zero (the child running through the ruins) and Stromboli (the tunny fishing and the escape). But they are all inconclusive.

You are right. It's because I hate a subject once it begins to constrain me. I hate the logical nexus of the subject matter. The narrative passages are necessary if you are to come to the critical event: but my natural inclination is to skip them and not bother with them. This is, I admit, one of my limitations — my language is incomplete. To be honest, I would be happy making only such episodes as you've mentioned. When I feel that the scene I'm shooting is important only for the logical development of the film, and not what I'm most anxious to say, then you see how helpless I am, I don't know what to do. But when the scene is important, when it's essential, then everything is simple and easy.

I've made films in episodes because I feel more at ease like that. It's enabled me to avoid passages which, as I say, are useful in a continuous narrative, but precisely because they are useful rather than decisive, are a burden to me, though I can't explain it. I am only at ease where I can avoid the logical nexus. Staying within the limits laid down by the story is really what I find most difficult.

What do you think is essential in film narrative?

As I see it, expectation. Every solution arises from expectation. Expectation is what brings things alive, what releases reality, and after all the waiting, brings liberation. Take for example the fishing scene in *Stromboli*. It's an episode born out of expectation. The spectator's curiosity is aroused about what is going to happen: then comes the explosion of the slaughter of the tunny-fish.

Expectation is the force behind every event in our lives: and this is so for the cinema too.

Can you now tell me how you began your film career?

By chance. I had been struck by Vidor's films: *The Crowd*, *Hallelujah*, etc.; they were perhaps the only 'classic' films I had then seen. I often went to see films because my father was the owner of the Cinema Corso. My first ventures were documentaries, made in consultation with my brother. *Prélude à l'après midi d'un faune* is not a film of a ballet, as you might think if you had never seen it. It's a documentary about nature, and so are *Ruscello di Ripasottile* and *Fantasia sottomarina*. I was struck by the water with the serpent slithering about in it and the dragonfly overhead. It's the kind of basic sensitivity you see in the puppies on the main-deck in *La nave bianca*, or the flower caught by the sailor as he disembarks.

How much is autobiographical in your films?

It's no accident that you ask that. There is a lot that's autobiographical in my films. In the documentaries you can find my youthful fantasies – a hornet buzzing, leaping fish mirrored in the water. Then came the war and the occupation, and many events we look back to and would like to have experienced. *Roma, città aperta* is a film about fear, the fear felt by us all but by me in particular. I too had to go into hiding, I too was on the run, I had friends who were captured or killed. It was real fear: I lost 34 kilos, perhaps through hunger, perhaps because of the terror I described in *Roma, città aperta*.

Then there's *Paisà*. It's been said that the most beautiful scene is the last: the mouth of the Po, the water and the wind in the

76 reeds. People expressed astonishment that I'd pictured that part of Italy so well. But I'd spent years of my childhood there. My mother was from there – I used to go hunting and fishing there.

With *Miracolo* and *Voce umana*, Magnani became a part of my world. In *Stromboli* a stranger enters the life of a simple man like the fisherman Antonio. And there's autobiography too in the feelings of the woman in *Stromboli*, brutalised by reality and turning back to fantasy – with a longing to expand, to embrace the whole world without letting go of reality, finding inner liberation in the call to God which is the final thrust of the film. She looks at the problem for the first time, almost unconsciously. It is only in the presence of nature, of her own self, and of God, that she has come to understand.

La macchina ammazzacattivi shows my wanderings on the Amalfi coast, places where I'd been happy, places I love, where some poor devils are convinced they have seen Satan. One of them told me one day, 'I've met the werewolf, I ran over him on my bicycle last night.' They are mad, crazed by the sun. But they have a power few of us possess – the power of the imagination.

In this film – which like *Amore* represents a search and a crisis – I had another aim as well: to get closer to the comedy of art.

Giullare and *Europa '51* are also autobiographical in that they express feelings I have observed in myself and in my fellow-men. In each of us there's the jester side and its opposite; there is the tendency towards concreteness and the tendency towards fantasy. Today there is a tendency to suppress the second quite brutally. The world is more and more divided in two, between those who want to kill fantasy and those who want to save it, those who want to die and those who want to live. This is the problem I confront in *Europa '51*. There is a danger of forgetting the second tendency, the tendency towards fantasy, and killing every feeling of humanity left in us, creating robot man, who must think in only one way, the concrete way. In *Europa '51* this inhuman threat is openly and violently denounced. I wanted to state my own opinion quite frankly, in my own interest and in my children's. That was the aim of this latest film.

The ability to see both sides of man, to look at him charitably, seems to me to be a supremely Latin and Italian attitude. It results from a degree of civility which has been our custom from very ancient times – the habit of seeing every side of man. For me it is very important to have been born into such a civilisation. I believe that what saved us from the disasters of the war, and other equally terrible scourges, was this view of life we have, which is unmistakably Catholic. Christianity does not pretend that everything is good and perfect: it recognises sin and error, but it also admits the possibility of salvation. It is the other side who only allow man to be perfectly consistent and infallible. To me that is monstrous and nonsensical. The only possibility I see

What are your future plans?

I have a great many, but I think most about *Socrate: processo e morte*. Socrates is a man of today. Xanthippe represents the devil. The story should be shown in three sections: an introduction, the trial, the death scene. The introduction will be set in Athens. I picture a city strung out, as the story has it, all along a road, with a landscape of infinite perspectives. Life here is simple and primitive. The houses look like some Etruscan tombs I saw at Cerveteri: the fields, animals scuttling round the houses, cauldrons hanging from the beams, goats sharing the houses of men, leaving behind them the evidence of animal life. Under the sandals of the inhabitants the name of their city is written, and so it is stamped into the earth they tread. As in *Giullare*, the costumes will be simple and timeless, in other words, costumes which don't look like costumes.

As in *Giullare* too, the events must correspond to reality. Socrates is bound to reach the same conclusions as St Francis, though St Francis came to them under the impulse of his dreams and hopes, and Socrates by logic. In St Francis it is instinct: in Socrates reason.

In our civilisation – Christian, Latin civilisation – we don't accept truth as given. We are full of irony and scepticism, and constantly in search of truth. We don't look at things with a materialist eye, or see only the facade: we look at things in perspective. This is how St Francis saw things – and so did Socrates.

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A true film-maker, in my view, has only one worthwhile aim: to investigate the world. Apart from complete, finished works, every director produces 'essays' in which he attempts to interpret the reality around him. This has always been the aim of my work. Ever since *Roma, città aperta*, I have maintained a conscious, determined endeavour to try to understand the world in which I live, in a spirit of humility and respect for the facts and for history.

What was the meaning of *Roma, città aperta*? We were emerging from the tragedy of the war. We had all taken part in it, for we were all its victims. I sought only to picture the essence of things. I had absolutely no interest in telling a romanticised tale along the usual lines of film drama. The actual facts were much more dramatic than any screen cliché.

It was almost the same with *Paisà*, with one slight difference. *Paisà* showed two worlds coming into contact, each with its own psychology and spiritual outlook: the worlds of the victor and the vanquished. This contact gave rise to such confusion that in the end there were neither victors nor vanquished, only the day-to-day heroism of man in his attachment to life: living on, in spite of everything, whichever side he had been on.

After *Paisà* I made *Germania anno zero*. The subject was still the same, but with the difference that this time we went into the enemy camp to observe him more closely, and try to discover the basic reasons for his acting as he had. Slowly the film revealed the problem of wrong teaching unwittingly brought out by my choice of subject. It came out naturally — there was no avoiding it.

The two episodes of *Amore* (*Il miracolo* and *La voce umana*) made up the next period. I think that even if they represented a move to another side of reality, both films fitted quite easily into my programme of work. It was at this point that I began to have a much clearer idea of the role of the cinema. I believed I had discovered the distinguishing quality of the cinema: its ability to see into the human soul like a microscope. A film is quite simply observation through a microscope.

Next came *Stromboli*. It is a portrait of a human being who has come out of the war a moral wreck — who has had to abandon everything, even morality, in order to survive. This person happens to land up in a society which has been organised for centuries along given lines, where she is no longer allowed to act outrageously: the world is re-discovering a definite moral equilibrium which it is impossible to rebel against. Many people have tried to depict *Stromboli* as an allegory of the problems of grace, but they

80 fail to understand it. It was only another stage along the path of my investigations. And in a different way the same was true of the new period which began for me with *Francesco Giullare di Dio*. This time it was the past I explored. I wanted to make an historical film in realist terms, to discover or rather, intuitively rebuild the fabric of a society far removed in time from our own. I was able to do what I wanted, and it gave me a better understanding of genuine moral values. After letting pride and stubbornness run riot, I now had a chance to grasp what tolerance and humility can be.

Like everyone else I am a man living out a particular brief life-span in a particular century. What is the first thing I should try to do, if not take stock of the situation? In a world entirely taken up with ideologies, what freedom do we have? I see only one: the freedom to give one's allegiance to one of the three or four dogmas on the market. Only an anarchist, an outcast from society, can remain apart from these dogmas. But in fact the problem is one of vocabulary as much as one of allegiance: use the wrong words and you're a dead man.

It's a terrible, monstrous situation. This is why there came a point when I felt it absolutely necessary to make *Europa '51*. It has been alleged that the film is too self-centred, too exclusively concerned with myself and my need for an orientation. I don't deny it: but this itself is an understandable part of human experience. I would add that in this film the 'exploratory' element was more important than anything else: not only for the value it gave the film, but even more, in developing me as a person and helping me to mature.

And so we come to *Viaggio in Italia*. After the problems of 'doctrinaire' society, it was fair enough to deal with the problems of small people of no doctrine. I tried to do so by setting up an encounter between two civilisations, two different kinds of upbringing. This is such a dramatic experience that it's difficult to grasp. I myself have made a close study of the meeting of the Nordic and Latin worlds. It is the first time in history that we have had such close contact. Civilisation can be divided, figuratively speaking, into two categories: 'toga' civilisation, the civilisation of men who still (morally speaking, of course) dress in robes; and 'sewing' civilisation, the civilisation of men who have had to cover their bodies with the sewn hides of beasts in order to survive. The result is two quite different kinds of men. 'Sewing' man is, logically enough, a highly efficient individual, while 'toga' man has an easier, more relaxed view of life. What I tried to do, then, was to bring two specimens of 'sewing' man into a completely 'toga' world — a world which has after all made such a great contribution to the creation of modern civilisation. And then I simply observed them — that's how *Viaggio in Italia* began.

La paura, which I made in Germany, had the same kind of

theme, but it was more delicate, less clearly stated. Lastly came the experience of *India*. Some critics claim it marks a break with my previous work. I am convinced they are wrong – not that I can claim to be incoherent (coherence is often the product of *ennui* plus a lack of imagination). I do however consider it normal and quite justifiable that I felt curiosity for this completely new world which was coming into being. Perhaps there I was physically taken back to the extraordinary atmosphere we lived in in Italy from 1944 to 1946, like children thrust into a discovery of life. But that was not all. In India I encountered much that I had already intuitively felt. When we speak of tolerance and intolerance, it is with only a vague idea of the meaning of the words. Only in India do they take on their full significance. One day Rhada Krishna, an exceptionally acute philosopher, and the Vice-President of India, made a remark to me, the kind of observation which strikes to your very heart : 'The level of a people's civilisation', he said, 'is gauged by their capacity for tolerance. . . .'

In India there is nothing dogmatic. The Hindus have no God made flesh. They seek our God wherever he is to be found, and so they are building a society in which there is infinite tolerance, in which the unconventional is the salt of the earth. I made my Indian documentary about such men: not about *things*, which I don't find interesting, but about *men* involved in life. When necessary, I give concrete facts, true stories and experiences, which take me further into the soul of these men, into their way of acting as part of a mass, in a social sense. I have tried to show the human side of India, not the mysterious side, the side that attracts the tourists.

I think my future work will be more and more along these lines. What I have done for India could be done for the whole world. It would be an enormous undertaking, too big for me to carry out alone. I would only be the promoter; and I would be surrounded by many others, especially young people, who want to work in the same way – in Russia, China, South America, Africa – everywhere.

We really know nothing, not just about India, but even about France, about the Republic of San Marino, Campagna or Calabria. This is what is so absurd about modern civilisation. . . . We have the world at our finger-tips (India is only thirty flying hours away) but we don't know it at all. If there were no other reasons – the artistic and even industrial reasons – this alone would prove the urgent need for cinematic research and exploration; as well as showing the need to turn everyone's curiosity and interest towards the farthest corner of the globe.

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Interview with Rossellini by Francisco Llinas and Miguel Marias
with Antonio Drove and Jos Oliver, Madrid, January 1970.

Can you tell us about Socrates?

I try to make films which give general information and a general sense of direction. We made a twelve hour series, *La lotta dell'uomo per la sua sopravvivenza*, which is a sketch of the history of man from the time he appears on earth to when he lands on the moon. It's a history of new ideas, of the difficulty getting them accepted and the painfulness of accepting them. The whole of human history is a debate between the small handful of revolutionaries who make the future, and the conservatives, who are all those who feel nostalgia for the past and refuse to move forward. The film gives an outline of history — I think it's useful as a start, because school study programmes have degenerated so and don't meet modern needs. It gives me a kind of core around which I shall take certain key moments in history and study them in greater depth. I made *Atti degli Apostoli*, for example, because I think the arrival of Christianity was an important turning-point, changing man's relationship to nature and thereby putting him in a position to act. The result was Western civilisation. This happened in the specific historical context of Greece, Rome and Jerusalem, *Atti degli Apostoli* is about Jerusalem. For Greece, I've chosen Socrates, who may have been much earlier, but represents in embryo everything that was to come. Greek civilisation was based on fate. Destiny plays the principal role throughout all Greek tragedy. Socrates introduced the idea that man must use his brain, and he was condemned for it. His starting point was magnificent: 'All I know is that I know nothing.' And from the idea that it's necessary to use reason, came science. My next film will be *Caligula*.

Do you write your scenarios on the basis of actual fact?

I don't write scenarios. I'm incapable of it. But I have fairly definite ideas. For one thing I have read all the documents about Socrates, though there are few enough of them. The basic source is Plato's writings, but even there you have to be careful: some modern critics raise doubts about them. But they are important works. And then it's possible to reconstruct the life of the period on the basis of documents. For example, everyone talks about Athenian democracy, but we know nothing about it. No one dreams what it was really like. There were continual elections, which were really tantamount to drawing lots — they weren't proper elections. They

drew names and then black or white voting balls, and if a white ball was drawn at the same time as a name, that person was elected to public office. Another interesting point concerns the tribunals which judged Socrates and others. There was a jury of 515 people. They drew lots in the morning and they had to give the verdict before dark, as they didn't dare let them sleep. History is full of things like that – it makes it more spectacular and more accessible to the public. I am very strict in this respect, and don't allow myself to make anything up. I perhaps allow myself some interpretation of the psychology of the character, but none of it is invention.

What will Caligula be like?

It will be a proper film, because it's a difficult thing to deal with for television – for example, Caligula and his sister were lovers, and if you cut that you lose all the historical feeling and authenticity. I make him into a rather special character. If you have read *The Lives of the Caesars*, you'll know that Suetonius thought all twelve Caesars were a bunch of madmen. But Suetonius was writing long after the event, when these families were no longer in power, so I think it's rather a facile view. I've adapted the story of Caligula to the psychology of a modern Roman. He was the son of Germanicus, who had been a great hero and a champion of the republicans. The birth of the Roman Empire was a gigantic paradox: after a hundred years of war between the republicans and the monarchists, the republicans won and proceeded to build the Empire. Germanicus was almost certainly poisoned by Tiberius, after giving him the support of his legions in the election. Caligula's brothers and his mother were also assassinated by Tiberius and Caligula himself was deposed by his grandmother Julia and his younger sisters, one of whom was to be the mother of Nero – nice little sisters for a man to have. My stories are strictly historical but there is always some room for interpretation of character. In my opinion Caligula, as the son of Germanicus, is a Republican. His grandmother knows it and so do his sisters, and Tiberius is soon informed. He decides to adopt him and make him emperor so that he won't stand in his way. He couldn't kill him as he had killed his father and brothers, as public opinion would have rebelled against him. This probably is what happened, for Tiberius did say, 'Thus shall I rid myself of the serpent in my breast'. Later Caligula joins forces with Tiberius and becomes his heir. This is all true. He began with extraordinary acts of justice – for example, he ordered the burning of all documents concerning Tiberius's trials of his mother and brothers, which meant that they were rehabilitated. He called elections, to find out what public opinion was, but no-one would take part. Gradually he realised that the corruption ruling in Rome was so great, and the people so insensitive, that there was nothing he could do. And suddenly he

began to do insane things, going so far as to make his horse a consul. In my view he did these crazy things in order to debase the idea of the Empire in the eyes of the Romans. He did quite incredible things, but Rome could take incredible things. For example, he declared war on the North Sea, and marched from Rome with his legions, a hundred thousand men in all. I'm not making this up, and it isn't some scriptwriter's fancy — he got to the shore of the North Sea and ordered them all to start gathering shells. In Rome, the Senate hailed it as a great triumph. It's all highly paradoxical.

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When you choose these key characters, do you take their contemporary significance into account?

I think it's enough to know what happened, there's no need to think up fables. The world is always the same because it is shaped by men. It's easy to find parallels with things that happen today — it's a matter of chance, and I have no interest in picking them out. *La prise de pouvoir par Louis XIV* describes the technique of taking power — which is a useful thing to know. What *Caligula* shows is how corruption can reach such a point that people can no longer identify their own interests. I think that's a serious matter. But the thread that runs through all these films is the reconstruction of daily life. If you've seen *Atti degli Apostoli* you'll have noticed how meticulously it's recreated. It's important because it shows a recognisable side of man.

Can you tell us about L'età del ferro and how it is related to La lotta dell'uomo per la sua sopravvivenza?

It's a matter of looking at history from different angles. *La lotta dell'uomo per la sua sopravvivenza* is much more concerned with ideas, which are always related to technology as well. The agricultural revolution was a great advance for mankind, the first great revolution carried out by man, because from then on man was not so completely at the mercy of nature and began to use it to strengthen himself. He no longer feared nature and gradually embarked on the decisive conquest of it. *L'età del ferro* is more concerned with the development of technology. The technology of iron brought advancement, and changed men's way of looking at things. It began with the Etruscans. Etruscan civilisation spread from north of the Tiber into Tuscany and across Italy to Venice. In that period, the Iron Age, about 1200 years BC, the great metal-producing centres of Europe were Etruria and Spain. The metal production of Etruria was a possible focus of development within Italy. The Greeks, who had established themselves in the south of Italy, went up to Central Italy in search of iron ore, which was already indispensable to them. They built roads for this and it is possible that Rome was built at a junction in this road system, since it lay at a point where the Tiber could be forded. The adven-

86 turers and prostitutes who were living there eventually began to levy a toll. This is a different, much more concrete way of looking at history.

All these films are very concrete and at the same time very meaningful. Can you tell us how you achieve this?

I don't know, it's part of my way of doing things. The scenes are very faithfully reconstructed. I always begin with the things of daily life. For example, when coins began to circulate in Greece tunics had no pockets. So people carried the coins in their mouths and when they had to speak, they spat them out into their hands, and put them back in their mouths after they'd finished speaking. It's very concrete, but highly significant. It's a way of making the film interesting and saying something original at the same time as giving real information.

In L'età del ferro there are fragments of other films, such as Austerlitz, Scipione l'Africano, etc. Was this because of economic difficulties?

It's very important to make the film spectacular, because above all you must entertain people. These are films which should be of use not just to intellectuals but to everybody — if they were not it would be pointless to make them. They have to be spectacular and that means spending a lot of money, which you can't do for TV. These are cultural programmes and so they come furthest down in the television budget. If you try to fight to change this you don't get any films made, and the important thing is to make films. So we took some sections of other films and re-used them in a different context, and in this way we got the spectacular effect for much less.

What role do you play in the series your son has made?

I write what you might call a scenario, though it isn't really, it's more a series of suggestions and bits of information, and the series is made from that. I virtually produce them — I certainly follow them very closely, but I leave him complete freedom and responsibility.

Is it true that your son directed some scenes in one of your films?

When I was making *La prise de pouvoir par Louis XIV*, one of my daughters was having a very serious operation, and on the day I left Paris for Florence. As production couldn't be held up, my son shot the sequence in the kitchen and the dining room.

Your son directs the series and you make the films. Why is this?

Because I'm older and can't work as hard: but it doesn't make any difference.

It's more like *La lotta dell'uomo per la sopravvivenza*. It too will be twelve hours long. It shows the beginning of a complete transformation of the world, and the origins of the modern world. It starts with short scenes from the Middle Ages, as you always have to have a definite starting point. The Middle Ages saw the establishment of a completely vertical kind of civilisation, with very strictly defined values, and a clearly established way of thought. We had to show the normal everyday life of the artisans, the guilds and the corporations. The film goes on from these brief scenes to the discovery of the technology which gave rise to the Industrial Revolution, and therefore to a related series of phenomena like colonisation, new forms of social organisation and the new political ideas.

What other series or individual films do you intend to include in this panorama of history?

A number of key points come out of the series on the Industrial Revolution, for example the period of the French Encyclopaedia. We shall show developments of modern time as well; recently there have been extraordinary phenomena such as youth movements which begin with very great energy, and then disperse because they encounter so many obstacles. And then there's the problem of men taking on more and more responsibilities, needing to make themselves better and better as men. Then I want to make a film of the history of colonisation, which is very important, and arises directly out of the Industrial Revolution. And for western countries I am thinking of making a history of Japan, which could be very interesting, as it's a highly developed country, scientifically and technically one of today's four great world powers, but appearing in a much less advanced part of the world. I think it's very important to study it closely. These plans are enough for three or four years' work.

Will it take you very long to make Socrates?

Four weeks – I never take long to make films. It will be two hours long, so that it can be shown on TV as well as in the cinema, and it will be in colour. I do everything in colour now.

Do you think your work will be affected by being shown on TV networks which still don't have colour, as in Spain?

You will have colour soon, and there's always some delay in showing these films. But it wouldn't matter very much if you saw them in black and white. Externally it would not look so good, but internally it wouldn't change. What matters is not seeing the film in the best possible conditions, but the film itself, and you can't

88 do much harm to it by showing it on a small screen instead of a big one, or in black and white instead of colour.

What is your attitude towards colour?

Quite simply realist.

Aren't you making these films in chronological order? Why did you make L'età del ferro, which covers the whole span of history, before La prise de pouvoir par Louis XIV?

These were the first two, and they're experiments trying to show what could be done in this field. After that the real educational operation began. I have a better order now, but the problem is there are hold-ups. It can happen that I have difficulty in making a particular film, and have to alter the order. *Caligula*, for example, has been a great problem, as I can't make it for TV, and to do it for the cinema I'd have to accept production norms, use well-known actors etc, and this would make it impossible for me to make the film I want to: I can't make it in such conditions. Perhaps I'll leave it until later to make it, but I must make it somehow.

Does it matter to you what order the public sees these series in?

It ought to matter, but I don't mind as long as they are shown soon. If they see *Atti degli Apostoli* first and then *La lotta* there's no harm done, though it would be better to see them in the order in which they were made. We have a production problem as well. They're not easy to produce – they're fairly dear for TV, though they're cheap in terms of the cinema. To make a good film which will reach the widest possible audience, you have to make it spectacular. TV has great potential but at the same time it is very restricted. The tendency towards this kind of programme is still not very marked: the need for it is felt but it's not yet clearly expressed.

Educational Cinema

When did you first form this interest in making educational films? For example, were Vanina Vanini, Viva l'Italia and Francesco, giullare di Dio, a part of this plan?

I've always had an inclination for it – less definitely, of course, and instinctively rather than consciously. Then I gradually realised that the cinema wasn't up to much, because there was so much to be said and at that time it was saying things of very slight importance – so I began to work on this programme of study and explanation.

But don't you think the aim of Europa '51 was as laudable as that of your recent films?

Yes, but I had to make it then, in 1951, because when it was released, all the political forces hated it, they felt exposed. In all honesty I must say that in 1947-48, I don't remember when exactly, a French friend of mine interested me in a book by Marcuse, and I read it. It's not that I based myself on the book, but it obviously made me think in a certain way about things – and so I thought it very important to make a film about the situation in Europe. It was an attempt to show contemporary history, and I think *Europa '51* even predicted things we have seen happen since.

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In 1965, you published a manifesto about educational cinema along with Bertolucci, Cottafavi, Amico, Brass and others. Did it have any practical repercussions, apart from Amico's *Tropici*, which was also made for TV?*

I don't think so, but I don't really know. I didn't see *Tropici*, but in Pasolini's latest film, *Medea*, all the first part, on barbarian civilisation, is very educational. It's a good sign.

Pasolini admits to being influenced by some of your films, especially Francesco, giullare di Dio.

I can't give you a critical judgement. Pasolini is someone very important, very tormented and involved – an extraordinary man.

You wrote a very enthusiastic piece about Uccellacci e uccellini. Do you feel close to Pasolini in some way?

When Pasolini made the film it seemed very likely that it would be a complete failure commercially. So I defended the film because I thought it was right.

Do you think your ideas about educational cinema should be adapted to the cultural level of the people who will be seeing these films?

I don't think so, because you have to be very direct, and find out what stimulates people's imagination: and what's more I think that while people may have different levels of culture, they don't differ in their ability to understand things. There is really nothing beyond men's understanding: all it takes is to say things comprehensibly, in as entertaining and interesting a way possible.

But for example, the kind of subject to be dealt with will vary from country to country.

I follow what I believe in. For example, we give *La lotta dell'uomo per la sua sopravvivenza* free to the underdeveloped countries, and let them use it as they want, with complete freedom. If they want to make an introduction running down our civilisation and what it has brought them, they can do so – because in this way you can carry out useful educational work. So far I've only made films

* See Editor's note, page 110.

90 about things that happened around the Mediterranean, because that's what I understand best. But these films can be used by people as they like, even to criticise us if they want. The important thing is to open the debate and start a discussion.

Everybody still talks of you, even today, as a neo-realist, though that seems to us to be an over-simplification.

It's just a label.

It's said there's a break between your earlier films and your more recent work for TV. It seems to us that your way of looking at things is still the same, and your aim is still the same: to understand reality. The only difference we can see is that your early films had contemporary subjects, and now they are more historical. Your early characters suffered things passively, while Louis XIV and Caligula are people who act. Can you tell us how this change of perspective came about? Why is the outlook different, when the vantage point is the same?

I accept what you say. Of course, one matures, one's own experience deepens. Man is in struggle with himself, a struggle between his animal and human sides. Anatomically the result is that the cerebellum is the oldest and strongest part of the brain. If a man dies and is put into a resuscitation chamber, this is the first part to recover, followed by the heart, lungs, etc. But the cortical area, which is the newest and the most delicate, as well as the most advanced – since this is where thought arises – does not recover. Man in a way feels the responsibility this part of the brain lays on him and often tries to put it to sleep. Alcohol, and certain inhalants found in all civilisations, are ways of evading this responsibility. This tendency is more violent in the modern world, because man's responsibilities are greater. He feels afraid of them, he either confronts them or runs away. When he runs away he becomes an animal. We are in a period of great progress. Should we reject it and hold ourselves back, or go along with it and master it? This is why we must constantly raise our consciousness. For example, I have never re-seen any of my films, because I'm afraid of the temptation they offer to stay tied to things that are over and done with. It leaves me free to go in search of new things. I undertake the search because of what I am. I don't change: my age changes, but not my nature. I now think that what's important is to show man that he can be completely human, and that responsibilities too can give him exceptional happiness.

What do you think now of films like Viaggio in Italia or Stromboli, terra di Dio?

I don't think about them. Things that I've completed are finished with for me, they concern me very little.

That's strange, because they are more intimate, personal films, perhaps more autobiographical than the others, which take a distance from things.

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Yes, but for all the appearance of taking a distance, they're always a little autobiographical in the end, I can't fail to feel involved. And when I make a film it's not something I want to see again. I'm interested in things that are to be done.

The Teaching of Cinema

It's well known that you're in favour of informing people and opposed to 'educating' them, but we'd like to know how you think the teaching of the cinema should be organised.

As the director of the Rome Centro Sperimentale, I have done some things in this field, and I hope they've been right. In particular, I reduced the number of students to the financial capacity of the school. We accept only as many students as can really do everything in the two years they spend there. There are twenty-eight, nine of them foreign, and they form one group, while the nineteen Italians are split up into four other groups. Apart from the studies they do over two years, they make their first pieces of film in the television studio, because the eye can adjust with the Ampex and they can check what they have filmed at once. Then they go on to 16mm, and those who are able to go on to make full-length films, but on their own account, not ours. They are quite free to do what they want. This is how the school is organised today. We don't have our own professors, but we call in people who are highly qualified in a wide variety of fields. The course is designed to give a thorough knowledge of technique which enables the students to get to grips with the cinema and also to experiment with new things. Together with this, as well as three months' practical work, we organise seminars sponsored by the school. For my part I think it's highly relevant to hold seminars on economics, psychology and sociology, so that they'll talk about things they know about, not what they've been told. We also organise what seminars the students think necessary — if two or three people want a seminar on the history of the cinema, we hold it; if a few, or even one, want one on advertising, we do that as well.

Are there classes in cinematographic theory or the grammatical rules of the cinema?

No. All the students who come to the school know much more about it than we do. What could we teach them? Such things can't be taught, methods of that kind have entirely disappeared. If someone thinks it necessary, he asks for a seminar. But don't you think they all know these things? Who could teach them?

92 What's important is to have a technical medium. If the student is an artist, that's all he needs. If he's not, I think it's absurd to imagine that someone else can make him into one. All the students have a study grant of 75,000 lire a month, and food provided. So they don't have subsistence problems, which I think is very important. The students are also on the Administrative Council and have a consultative vote. I think it all works very well. They are completely responsible for themselves and we don't have to worry about discipline at all, as they see to it themselves. The important thing is for the school to be as efficient as possible. I should add that the overall curriculum is adapted to the type of student we have: the courses are determined by their needs.

Are the films made at the school shown to the public?

We can't show them commercially because the school is a state institution. This year we presented a student's film at the Locarno festival, and last year we entered one at Venice. We can do this kind of thing, and we also show in cine-clubs.

Does the school produce the students' films when they've finished?

Never. We have three well-equipped miniature studios, planned a long time ago. The students can experiment in them at times. The school also has a rather good film library, with some 11,000 films.

Man is Everything

Why do you have so little interest in fiction, and in the narrative mechanism used to create emotions in what is usually called fictional cinema?

Because reality is much more fantastic than fiction.

It seems to us that a high degree of confidence in reality is the cornerstone of your film-making.

Above all I have confidence in man. Man is everything. What interests me most is to see him operating, in any circumstances.

But isn't your confidence in reality, which goes together with a rejection of fiction, also a way of avoiding personalism? I mean, you always have a very clear moral viewpoint about what matters, but at the same time you don't want to point it out, because you have confidence that things will speak for themselves.

I try to intervene as little as possible. My work is scientific: I observe things and bring them into contact – which of course has to be done in such a way that they stand out and express themselves. I restrict myself to doing that, always staying close to the reality of the world and the reality of man, which is the basic thing.

This confidence in man is expressed also in the fact that you don't underline a point, placing your confidence not only in the reality you film, but in the viewer.

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If I have confidence in man, I must have confidence in the viewer. If I didn't believe in man, I would no longer be a man myself, and if I set out to doubt man, I would be a monster.

Your films tend to be less and less dramatised.

Dramatisation and the search for effect take you further from the truth. If you stay close to the truth, it's difficult to go looking for effect. To make a film well it's necessary to eliminate all falsification and try to free ourselves from the temptation to falsify reality.

Is this why you don't like Il generale della Rovere?

It's an artificially constructed film, a professional film, and I never make professional films, rather what you might call experimental films.

The advantage the cinema has over literature is that reality is always so rich that it can overcome any schematism on the part of the director a hundred times over; whereas when you write, all you have before you is the paper — you have no immediate point of reference and no guarantee of objectivity.

What's important in literature is to lay bare the personality of the writer. — it's a more concentrated form of work, whereas if you make a film, you have to give general impressions, as it's very difficult to analyse. You have to do so where it's unavoidable, but if you make a completely analytical film, you lose the spectacular element and you lose everything. The cinema has the advantage that, if you know how to look at things, you can put so much into one picture that the result is quite complex, while writing is analytical work, consisting of putting one idea down after another and organising them.

It's as if you were looking for some kind of communion between man and nature. For example, at the end of the first chapter of Atti degli Apostoli the camera pans around the upper table from one to another, showing the community among them.

All these things come about in a completely instinctive way, not as the result of forethought. If they were planned they would appear cold and mechanical. They must arise from natural impulse. For example, the very long pan from the hands of these real workers and peasants to their faces, is a form of microscopic discovery, it's like watching a cell. Even more than being in harmony with nature, man must be conscious of it, and also dominate it. But the relationship between man and nature can never be

94 eliminated, even if it is artificial, as it is in the city. Many traumas arise from this relationship with nature, and with the universe too — we are only just beginning to realise what the universe is.

From India to the 'Nouvelle Vague'

I suppose that the experience of India strongly influenced your attitude of confidence in man.

It did. You are in contact there with an enormous mass of humanity. Going down the street is like swimming through a river of men. Countries are underdeveloped basically because they lack the right technology, but they aren't really because they live within a clearly defined civilisation. We in the advanced countries live in a less clearly defined civilisation, which has not yet stabilised: we are on our way to a new civilisation. In the underdeveloped countries the roots are deeper — the basic ideas may be backward, but they allow for an exceptional human equilibrium. India is a moving place, because of both the great drama it is living through in its vast population explosion, and the heroic struggle it is making to face up to the problem. What makes it heroic is the method of struggle. It's moving to think that Gandhi, who originated non-violence, was born in a country which is in fact very violent — though 'non-violence' is an imprecise translation of the term he actually used, which was 'not harming anyone'. It is an amazing concept. Gandhi took a stand and said, 'between violence and cowardice, I choose violence' — and yet he did everything possible to avoid it. Gandhi is the product of his civilisation. And we shouldn't forget that India also gave us the 'nought'. There's nothing so concrete and at the same time so abstract as the figure nought — it's very profound as a concept, making it possible to keep the two dimensions together.

When you went to India, did you intend to make a film?

I didn't have a ready-made plan, I thought I'd do a lot of filming. I wanted to make both a film and a documentary. India is a very interesting country to film. It was the first country to be de-colonised. Once Gandhi came to Rome. As early as 1931 or 1932, at a London round table, I had told him that I should like to go to India to see the new world emerging there. Then later I saw Nehru when he was on a visit to Europe, and spoke to him about it again.

Have you seen other films about India, like Renoir's The River or Malle's Calcutta?

I didn't see *Calcutta* so I'm only going by what I've been told, but I think he had the wrong attitude to go to an underdeveloped country with. You have to go with the intention of seeing what's

positive – it's much easier to see the negative side. I don't think it's a very compassionate attitude. It's very easy to give people a one-sided impression. Renoir's film is fantastic, but it's of quite a different kind to mine.

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Did Godard really have that interview with you about India '58, or did he make it up, as it's been suggested?

I think he made it up. Godard is an exceptional person, and astonishingly talented. He is really one of the most honourable people I know, he's exceptionally upright.

*Did you have anything to do with the early 'nouvelle vague' films? It's been said you supervised the scenario of Chabrol's *Le Beau Serge*.*

No, what happened was this: when I met these young men for the first time they were critics for *Cahiers du Cinéma*. I had a great exchange of ideas with them and we became very friendly. They were all very eager to make films. I strongly advised them to remain independent – that's my only contribution. At a time when there was a big crisis in the cinema I thought I could get them money to make their films. A law had been passed in France to aid experimental cinema. For a while I tried to convince a producer who was a great friend of mine, a very intelligent and unusually good producer, to help them – I tried for nearly a year but when the time came to start work it all fell through. I had discussed a lot of ideas for films with these young people – but soon after this I went to India.

What do you think of the way these directors have developed?

I'm very friendly with them but I don't know about all their films because they only tell me about the ones I like best. For example, I'm sure I'll see Truffaut's *L'Enfant Sauvage* soon, because he wants me to see it. But there are some films they think won't interest me. We have a fraternal and friendly relationship still.

Early Beginnings

How did you get into the cinema?

Partly by chance and partly by vocation. My father was very rich, we had no financial problems. He built the first 'modern' cinema in Rome in 1918. I had free access to it and saw a great many films. What's more my father was a great patron of the arts and our house was always full of artists: when my father was alive Sundays were marvellous because the most interesting people would come to the house. So I always had a great interest in art. This, together with the fact that I knew a great deal about the cinema, which was fairly rare in those days, meant that when my father died and our fortune vanished, I could go to work in

96 films, taking advantage of the fact that I knew a lot of people in the business. I began by doing cutting and editing for a short time. Then I did a lot of work writing scenarios for other people. This is why I have such contempt for scenarios: I know how they're written. Then I began to practise making shorts.

We saw one, Fantasia sottomarina, and I believe you made another one about fish. Why were you so interested in fish?

I have always loved fishing. I knew the sea but at that time it was thought impossible to film underwater. In 1929 three Japanese had come to the gulf of Naples for underwater fishing, though at that time there were no underwater masks or rifles, let alone cameras.

I've been told the fish were moved on strings.

They sometimes were because we were filming in an aquarium and some fish died very quickly, so that for some scenes we had to manipulate them like puppets.

Your early films, such as La nave bianca, already show the characteristic way of approaching reality that came out in Roma, città aperta.

I think that's true, though it should be said that half of the copy of *La nave bianca* now in circulation isn't mine. My name isn't even on it, because they took the film out of my hands and changed it. The whole of the naval battle is mine, but the sentimental part was done by De Robertis, who was director of the Navy Film Centre – he had asked me for a short about a hospital ship. The style was the same as in *Roma, città aperta*.

And the same as in your recent films.

The method doesn't change. Perhaps I have improved it now – at that time my steps were faltering. In *Roma, città aperta* we were just emerging from the horrors of the war, and it was necessary to look at it clearly and objectively. I didn't for instance want to make the German out to be just a demon – I tried to give him a psychology and show him as corrupted and drugged, in order to explain his behaviour and make him understandable as a human being.

But in Roma, città aperta the Germans are shown in a different way from the other characters: they're shown more schematically, because your own ideology is imposed on the film.

I know that there is that weakness. I tried to explain the Germans – but at that time they were an intangible entity ruling over us, who would come along every so often and beat us up and pull our nails out. They were like a terrible accident that happened

over and over again. We had no other contact with the Germans, and this is the reason for the disparity with the rest of the characters. I wanted to carry out a psychological reconstruction, but I didn't know enough to do so — the conversation between the three Germans, when one of them gets drunk and says that the end has come, was an attempt to do this. I don't know whether it was accurate, but I imagine that from time to time they must have felt a prick of conscience. You have to have some compassion for the enemy.

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In Era notte a Roma the informer, Tarsizio, is a cripple. Was this an attempt to explain his behaviour?

This was someone that I knew in real life. I had to hide from him for months. He was crippled, and that gave me some insight into his psychology, which gave rise to the character in the film.

The character played by Ingrid Bergman in Europa '51 is intriguing — coming so soon after Francesco, giullare di Dio she seems almost Franciscan.

That's right — they're necessarily linked, it's not just coincidence.

The character played by Fabrizi in Roma, città aperta reminds me of Brother Ginepro in Francesco, and there was something similar in the episode with the monks in Paisà, too.

Yes, there is. That episode of *Paisà* began in a very interesting way. When I was making the film and needed equipment, I came across an American regiment posted in Rome and they gave me an armoured car, two or three jeeps, a few arms and three German prisoners with an escort of Americans to guard them. But the guards were always slipping off and were never there when we were shooting the film. These poor devils, being German, needed precise orders, and when there was no guard on them they didn't feel like prisoners. They went off to a monastery to find somewhere to sleep: at least there they had rules to comply with and they would not be in danger if they spent the night there. And that's how I found the monastery. When I went there to collect the prisoners I met the monks, who were moving in their simplicity, and so I thought up that episode.

How did you achieve such a tone of comedy?

It was the way the monks played themselves. Perhaps you remember the scene where one of them goes into the kitchen, lifts the lid off the pot and says, 'Ah, that smells good!' That was Brother Raffaele, who was very old and didn't understand much that went on. I told him to go into the kitchen, bend over to sniff at the pot, and say the phrase. 'All right?' I asked and he said, 'Yes, signore'. So he stuck his head so far down into the pot that I had to

sit on the floor and pull him back so that he wouldn't burn himself. He was so ingenuous. Fellini was my assistant at that time, and he had to instruct the monks to come one by one into a cell where I had the camera. When it came to Brother Raffaele he stood back for Fellini, because he didn't want to go through the door before the director's assistant. It came out as a comedy quite naturally. The same thing happened with *Francesco, giullare di Dio*, in which all the monks were played by real monks, except of course for Fabrizi who played a tyrant, and the very old monk, Giovanni il Semplice, who always goes around with Ginepro.

He was in Il Miracolo too.

He was a local beggar, an extraordinary character. At the end of *Francesco* all the monks decided to spin themselves round to determine what direction they will go in, and as he was lame he turned round very slowly and it took him half an hour to fall down. When he fell he was supposed to say 'I'm pointing to Embolo', but he couldn't understand it however much we tried to explain. When he fell, St Francis asked him where he would go and he said, 'After that bird', because there was a bird flying by. It was a priceless phrase and we kept it in. This beggar had a very red nose and so he was called Peparuolo, which means pimento. He was a very gentle person, and so old that he didn't understand a thing. At the beginning, I explained to him, 'St Francis says such and such to you and you reply such and such. All right?' 'Yes, signore'. So he went on and repeated all my instruction. I told him not to say anything but his own lines – he answered that he understood completely and then he went and did the same thing again. I decided it was useless to explain things so I sent him for a long walk while I got the scene ready, and I put him in it without saying a word to him. The scene came out of what he did.

You can tell that, because he always repeats what St Francis says.

Giovanni il Semplice was supposed to repeat what St Francis said – but if I explained it to him he didn't understand it at all. Doing it the other way it worked perfectly, and it was funny too.

Anna Magnani's character in Il Miracolo is very similar.

Yes, in the poor areas in the South, along the Amalfi coast, there are many beggars, some of them mad, and the good thing was that these characters really lived there. I once asked Brother Raffaele if he had ever had visions. 'Yes, always.' 'What do you see?' 'The saints.' 'Which saints?' 'All of them.' 'And the Virgin Mary?' 'Yes, signore, from head to foot.' From head to foot, not just in close-up! That's how I thought up Anna Magnani's part.

Would you tell us something about that very strange film, La macchina ammazzacattivi? It seems to be about the cinema.

It's rather a game, an attempt at comedy, and once more it's 99 about the Amalfi area.

This film and Dov'è la libertà? both have a tone of fantasy which is unusual in your films. Do they represent a tendency or are they just isolated cases?

They are experiments. *La macchina ammazzacattivi* is an isolated experiment, but *Dov'è la libertà?*, which is like it in some ways, is much more a side-product of *Europa '51*: it's related to it because it's an attempt to investigate the same situation. Then there's the extraordinary character of Toto. The film as it stands today is very much hacked about, it was much more cruel. The softening up was done by the producers and it makes it more lightweight. But they're not very important films, just experiments.

Can you tell us about the sketch in Siamo donne?

That was just a piece of fun. It was almost all improvised. It's not something that really happened, but it's true to life.

In Stromboli there is a scene with Ingrid Bergman and a volcano erupting, which was done without any special effects. Did you take advantage of a chance eruption or was it part of the scenario?

The volcano started erupting – it was very good to me. The finale was supposed to be like that, though it was difficult to see how it could be made. But it started erupting quite happily. I always have confidence that these things will work out.

In Germania anno zero and in Europa '51 there are child suicides.

They are very different kinds of suicide. The child in *Germania anno zero* kills himself in a moment of despair. *Europa '51* shows a typical child suicide, an attempt to attract attention which goes wrong and the child is really killed. But the problem of children is there, it's very serious in modern times. I have children of my own and so this has always made me think a lot about children.

Many of your films are about a woman.

That's only natural. I'm a man and I have a natural interest in women. Women are so easily men's victims.

There is a degree of similarity between Germania anno zero and Los Olvidados.

I'm quite incapable of giving you a critical judgement.

It's a shame we have never seen your films before. I think you would have had a positive influence on the Spanish cinema. The two men we needed most were Bunuel and yourself, and it's only now that we're able to make contact.

100 Thank you for saying that.

What do you think of Giovanna d'Arco al rogo and of Angst, which we haven't seen?

It's difficult to remember. I think *Angst* was quite an effective film, along the lines of *Viaggio in Italia*. *Giovanna d'Arco al rogo* was more of an experiment. It was a Honegger opera and all Joan's lines were sung. It had often been produced with great success, and it offered a way of using all the techniques I now employ as a matter of course. It was the technical side of it which most attracted me.

Do you regard La voce umana as an experiment too?

Everything's an experiment. It did have some importance at the time, because the idea of microscopic cinema made it possible to observe things scientifically in a way which had never been attempted. It was a worthwhile experience for me, and in one way or another I've used the same method ever since. The subject was the pretext for making a particularly interesting experiment. Today the American 'underground' cinema has taken this to the point of insanity, filming a man sleeping for seven or eight hours.

Do you find that interesting?

Everything is interesting.

The Pursuit of Truth

Then how do you explain your polemic with Rouch over La Puniton?

It was the distortion of *cinéma-vérité* which started the argument. Rouch set off in an attempt to find truth in people. But the up-holders of this school had developed theories which distorted what had been a good principle. *Cinéma-vérité* is an absurdity. You can't trust to chance, because even if it does make it possible for you to observe immediate, day-to-day things, the film has to be worked on – if not it turns into the lowest kind of documentary. Where it's scientific it's worthwhile, but there it began to turn into dramatic cinema. Its value in terms of scientific investigation makes it possible to develop new dramatic techniques and observe things in a new way. My polemic with Rouch was quite friendly: what I was opposed to was his making a myth of *cinéma-vérité*. I recall that shortly after I came back from India he invited me to a UNESCO *cinéma-vérité* session. When I walked into the theatre I saw that everyone was bending down and looking at something underneath the screen. I could only see their backs and I thought they must be looking at a crocodile or an iguana or some other exotic animal. But then I realised it was

Don't you feel an affinity with this near-documentary approach to fiction that you object to in Rouch?

I do. But that was the other extreme. At first all films were fictional, and then there was an attempt to break away from this. That requires a careful study of psychological confrontation. From this to the purely coincidental was far too big a step. These films may have had some scientific value, but they were not themselves scientific, because the people who made them knew very well what had to happen. It was an ambiguous, worthless formula.

In this polemic, you said that the truly moral attitude is 'tenderness'.¹ Do you think that this attitude is valid at all times and in respect of all people?

Yes, because you can look at even the most terrible criminal in the world with compassion as well as hatred. I think it's right to look at people with affection and to make an effort to understand what goes on inside them.

If you gain an understanding of such a man, aren't you obliged to form a judgement, and say that he is a criminal for some specific reason?

I try to see things, never to make judgements. I try to show things as they are. Everyone is responsible for himself, and I don't feel I have a right to judge. What I am interested in is studying a phenomenon and trying to get into it, but I leave people at liberty. I don't want to act as a moralist, or say what people should do. My position is one of complete objectivity.

Sometimes that's very difficult. For example, you said yourself that in Roma, città aperta you were still too close to the events shown in the film, and that made it less objective.

But I did try to be objective. I tried to find out why the Germans acted as they did, and that in itself was a compassionate attitude.

You have often said that ideology is a prism. Do you not think that any religion is also an ideology, and therefore itself a prism?

Of course. I think that men must try their hardest to be themselves. This is another of the great lessons of India. All Indian thought is thought that can be called materialist and scientific. The Veda and the Holy texts are scientific works. But just as science is made of concrete, direct observations, we know that man also has a metaphysical dimension. Does God exist or did he arise in the minds of men? I don't know, but the phenomenon of religion does exist. It's therefore very important to examine it

102 scientifically. You should see how gently, and how freely as well, the Indians confront the problem of religion. The temples are open to everyone and anyone can go in and celebrate in any way he likes. There isn't a standard ritual. I remember that one day we were on our way to Tibet along a mountain road 4,000 metres high. Because of the heat of the engine and the high altitude our petrol evaporated, and we had to stop every few hundred yards to wait for the petrol to cool down. We saw a man carrying an enormous weight — he would catch up with us when we stopped and then we would leave him behind. This happened seven or eight times. At about dusk I saw him leave his load by a tree. He started looking around him, and went over to a stream, looking for something. He took a stone from the water, came back to the road, put the stone in the hollow of a tree and began his prayers. I realised that he was looking for some means of contact and found it in a stone.

Is your film about Sicily in some way like India '58?

It's a one-hour film. There are so many legends about Sicily — when you hear about Sicily what you hear about is the Mafia, and people imagine that everyone in Sicily is in the Mafia. No one makes an effort to see Sicily as it really is or to understand the behaviour of its inhabitants. Sicily has been invaded time and again: first by the Greeks, then by the Romans, and by all kinds of people from 500 AD on — the Arabs, the Normans and so on. Sicily has on average had a new master every 117 years. So it's obvious that each of them has had to impose ethics and laws which are quite out of keeping with the country. The Sicilians have turned further and further in on themselves. To have an idea of the tragedy of Sicilian history, you only have to know that not a single plant on the island today is a native one: everything was imported. The Arabs brought the orange-trees, the eucalyptus were brought from Australia in the late 19th century, the Romans planted the pines, the Greeks brought the olives. Sicily has been devoured — and so of course the Sicilian people have developed a tendency towards secrecy as a form of defence. Women are always the first victims of invaders, and this is the origin of the distorted view of women Sicilians have, as 'flesh of my flesh', and their pride in saving their women from the invaders. So their psychology is quite out of the normal run, with a secret hypertrophy of the 'ego'. The bandits made secrecy their method. But Sicily is far from being a land of bandits. My film was a kind of defence of Sicily.

A Simple Technique

How do you decide on your scenes? What are your criteria for what interests you?

There are scenes that any other director would have that you don't.

It's just a matter of my style. The way forward is always that of logic, and of the greatest effectiveness for the least expenditure of energy. It's a fairly basic rule.

In Il generale della Rovere you experiment with a moving lens for the first time.

I had used one before, but here I was taking it seriously. It's now my usual method. *Atti degli Apostoli* and *La prise de pouvoir par Louis XIV* were filmed entirely with moving lenses. I always defended the hand camera as a means of de-mystifying and de-dramatising the cinema. You have to make films simply and directly, and use the clearest possible language. I chose hand cameras to free myself from big industrial organisation. Since then they've been so much abused that going to the cinema is like boarding a ship, you come out feeling sea-sick. To avoid this but still have the same mobility, I made a camera that could be optically mobile but still remain in a fixed position, which would make these eccentricities impossible. I began by thinking out how to transform the zoom camera, in particular the controls. My system has two interlocking motors, and one of them acts as a counter-weight to stop the lens oscillating as it moves, so that you don't get a zoom effect. This gives me great mobility – for example, I can zoom from an angle of 25° to one of 150°, and this opens up enormous possibilities. I operate it myself, it's a very easy thing to use and you can improvise with it during shooting. If an actor isn't quite in the right spot, for example, you can follow him with the zoom lens. It saves a lot of time and it may improve the actor's performance – if he loses the rhythm during the scene usually it's much less convincing. These slight adjustments show him more closely. The camera works more like an eye, and so you can develop a system of constant direct participation, because when you have organised the scene and begun shooting, you can see if it's going well, and if not you can stop.

You sometimes use the zoom to give distance.

That shows how varied it's potential is. We always shoot in sequences, which reduces montage to a minimum. This optical mobility makes it possible to base it all on organising the scene, and this means you have to know the set very well. You have to establish it. Normally you take a shot showing the set as a whole, then the actor comes on, you cut in nearer to the actor, follow him etc. With the travelling lens you don't need to alter the distance. It's all linked in the context of the scene, which has to

follow a certain pattern and bring over a particular meaning. I have to know exactly where the actors are and make the meaning very clear. With this kind of mobility I can do that. I was tending to do this even before: in *Europa '51* there were many very difficult moving sequences, which had to be shot with the camera on a dolly following the actors around the whole time. In Hitchcock's films the moving shots are very important and he has to have special sets built that the actors can appear and disappear in, which is extremely complicated. But the travelling lens simplifies all this enormously.

Do you shoot film for TV with direct sound?

It depends. It's a problem of technique. *La prise de pouvoir par Louis XIV* was made entirely with direct sound, because they are extremely good at it in France. Nothing is done in the studio, it's all done in natural settings. So it takes a great deal of skill to record the soundtrack. You may remember hearing far-off noises of horse-drawn carts passing from time to time: in fact they were aeroplanes and we covered the sound over with the other noises. At other times all the sound is dubbed in. It's a technical problem. In Italy so little importance has been given to sound, in order to speed up production, that there are very few technicians who are able to do direct sound, whereas in France it's often used and the technicians are extremely good.

Were Germania anno zero and Angst made in German or Italian?

In German, because practically all the actors were German. The Italian copies are dubbed. Whenever I can I direct the Italian dubbing myself – I did it for *Viaggio in Italia*, for example.²

Do you have anyone working with you on the research for your films?

I use books, not people, because otherwise it would create enormous confusion.

Are you interested in the theatre? I know that you have directed Giovanna d'Arco al rogo and I carabinieri.³

Not really, because I'm too busy with other things: apart from the Centro Sperimentale, I am involved in other kinds of teaching too. I go to Houston, Texas, for two months, for example, to lecture at Rice University, which is one of the big American technical universities, to stimulate the interest of technical students in artistic expression. I try to show them that they can be artists. If a biochemistry graduate can find something artistic in his work, biochemistry can be made clear to everyone, wouldn't you think? It could be very useful, it could make all kinds of things understandable to the mass of people. These are things worth devoting one's energies to. I also have films to make – it's a lot of work.

Anima nera is going to be shown in Spain . . .

I think it's an awful film. It was based on a comedy by Patroni-Griffi, which I changed a little. After that I gave up films altogether.

Did you give up films just because producers were not interested in the films you wanted to make, and because of the time problem?

The producers didn't seem to be interested in my plans. And I already had fairly clear ideas about making these educational films. This was out so far as the cinema is concerned so I left. It's not exactly been easy with TV, but it's been less difficult.

So you're not saying that the cinema is finished.

There are two points I must make. Firstly, the cinema was no use for what I wanted to do, and secondly, it's now obvious how badly things were going: the film industry is dying on its feet and there's an enormous crisis. It's pointless to pretend otherwise, because it's the undeniable truth. In England, Japan, France, the United States and everywhere else, aid to the cinema has been cut enormously in recent years. These are the symptoms of crisis, and it's not surprising, as the film industry has never acted very sensibly. It's only ever got temporary deals. It's a good sign that the public has deserted the cinema when it's proved itself so useless. The industry is trying to save itself now by producing for a special public with sexual complexes and repressed violence. So it goes in for sensation, to capture this small section of the public. It's a good thing that not many people are attracted by that. The cinema must live on, but to do so it needs to be much more conscious of its duties. I think the division between cinema and TV is a false one, and a fusion of production could be a real solution. They're two media for diffusion, but in reality they're one. There isn't one set of aesthetics for films and another for television. They must be united and develop together, with a clear view of what has to be done. The world is convulsed by the need for knowledge. The men of today suffer because they are not told enough. We are living in a period full of discoveries and new ideas, but we know absolutely nothing of them and we end up with the anguish of living in a world which is being transformed without being able to observe the transformation. An American scientist conducted an experiment with children on the basis of a very important hypothesis. He believes that the basic impulses which have always motivated men are desire and fear. I would add another, the impulse to show knowledge. The desire to know is innate in man, and this desire goes together with the *need* to know, because we are victims of a civilisation we have built without virtually any participation in it, and we must make ourselves masters of it. This is the great problem. If this impulse does exist in man, he should

not be humiliated, and there is no call for teachers to speak down to him and tell him, 'You know nothing, listen to what I have to say. . . .' Things have to be said as if everyone knows them. This is the real problem today, and it's one the cinema should be aware of too. I think these are the great objectives of your generation, because it is yours that can carry them out, not ours.

So these films are an attempt to explain how and why we have reached this point? Will they also explain the situation we are in now?

Yes — we have reached the point we are at through a very special civilisation, unique I think in the history of man, the civilisation of specialists. Their mission has been accomplished, but only in one sense.

There has been no co-ordination, things have worked out by pure chance. I think the time has come to change this situation: the real question is to transcend the specialist and come back to man, because if man is made more complete, he will be able to participate in what he has created, and give it a real meaning. Many years ago Ortega y Gasset wrote about the anguish of specialised man. Defining some idealist suppositions, he goes on to describe exactly the anguished awareness man has of horizons which move further off and become more and more nebulous. This is quite obviously the point we have reached today.

Don't you think it is in a sense necessary, then, that the world should be made up of specialists?

There's a lack of professionals, but that's another matter. When I went to school in Italy, the early classes taught very general ideas, to children who were too young to synthesise them. As you went on with your studies, teaching became specialised and general ideas were left behind. You got to University and there you dealt with only a small portion of man's knowledge: and it was always out of date at that. Education produced for the market of the professions.

I don't know whether or not this was right. We don't yet have the historical facts that would enable us to say. The fact is that we have made enormous technical and scientific conquests which have changed our horizons completely. We must be aware of this, and realise what it is that men have been able to do: we are not victims, but masters. This is the meaning of my educational films, and so I try to work at pedagogy rather than philosophy, and to have the endless patience necessary to put back into order the whole of the alphabet of knowledge which has been scattered in a hundred and fifty years of parcellisation.

You view the cinema in a sense as showing the inner value and emotions of things, leaving the discussion of general ideas to more analytical media. This is consistent with the way you showed the heroism of daily life in your early films, and it reveals a confidence in mankind which requires a very sane-minded outlook quite unalienated from this reality of the world. It would be impossible to be so confident if you were alienated by reality.

It requires a great awareness. It's very uplifting to have this sense of value.

The most interesting thing you have said is about the need to stop complaining and do something.

We can't just resign ourselves to weeping, there's been enough of that already. We must move on to action of a different kind. I think that's what's important. Look at all the confusion that has been created in the world – we see it more every day. Where can men find a salvation of any kind? They adopt one orthodoxy or another. We are confronted by a paradox: we live in an extraordinarily young world, because at every second we are changing, and we are governed by dead men through these orthodoxies. There shouldn't be orthodoxies, there should be just men who at a particular moment in time have meant something as part of our culture and our civilisation. Merely observing orthodoxy takes us nowhere. It serves for a given moment, it doesn't allow us to know everything. If you live in an orthodox way, following a political ideology, you freeze in a certain mould, it becomes impossible to move forward. We must try to become masters of ourselves, and not let dead men be our masters, however great our respect for everything they have given us, and the visions with which they illuminated the future – it was for them the near future, not eternity.

Do you think that when one is alienated from the situation, trying to make films in the way you see it could remove this alienation?

What is alienation, if not being a stranger to reality? It's an absurd situation. Instead of being alienated from reality, you have to participate in it. If you want to change something, you must be a part of it. Not everything that is, is good. Some things are not and have to be corrected. Moaning about it will put nothing right – one only despairs and becomes unable to act. And action is what counts.

But for example, in a situation like that of Italy under Mussolini, I imagine there must have been some good things and a great deal of bad. How would it help to concentrate on the positive side?

108 You have to be aware of the whole. I know because I have lived through it. The years of fascism were twenty years of total darkness: it was like being kept in a state of ignorance. The wildest political ideas were born in Italy, out of ignorance: for example, Catholic communism, a contradiction in terms. We were tormented, wounded, confused — we didn't know what was happening. The motto of fascism was 'To believe is to fight': to believe in what existed and nothing else. There was not the least trace of dialectics. It exists today, a debate has born fruits. But to believe full stop had nothing dialectical about it, it was a living death. This is the great difference. Even among those peoples which claim to be the freest in the world, freedom has its limits. With faith in man, such as I have, one has faith in logic and rationality too. We know that however long it takes, we shall achieve it. To destroy everything means throwing away the whole of our cultural inheritance: it would not be a very rational thing to do. There are no limitations on man if change can be carried out not in a passion but rationally. When action becomes passionate, there is naturally a defensive reaction, because passion is not rational, and defence against it is built on the basis of a fear of irrationality. If you refer back to human reality, it is impossible to imagine anyone capable of saying, 'Today I am going to act like a scoundrel and a criminal.' I don't think such people exist. We all have aspirations towards justice, but we apply them badly. Very few men have adopted a method of criminal action in pursuit of an ideal. They have rather been wrong about things. Human intelligence knows no bounds. An animal, always acting by instinct and testing out the ground, isn't able to make such errors. Intelligence is magnificent, but it can also be very dangerous, because it gives the possibility of making very serious mistakes. Nothing in the world can hold back irrationality. There are men who can't understand what is the rational thing to do, and so divisions arise. We must constantly come together with each other. Our great historical destiny is to be men together. It is the most beautiful thing there is.

Do you agree with the Marxist theory that behaviour and super-structural phenomena depend on the economic system?

Yes, of course. Such ideas are very important, but I think we have entered a completely new period of history. Particular methods of observation and research are valid at a particular moment. Huizinga once said something very enlightening, to the effect that up until a certain point in history, the ruling sin was pride. When greed came to rule in its place, the world was transformed. Adam Smith marked the beginning of the whole of modern economics, and the opening up of a world based on greed, and on principles which religion and high ideals had condemned. The structures of this world were transformed into what they are today. Karl Marx,

living at the time, saw this world through the prism of the thirst for gain. Today something quite marvellous is happening in the world. The youth of America, for instance, have been born into a pragmatic world, and therefore in a place where the object of life is to take as much as possible, where there has been no class struggle, where a man of a lower class is permitted to rise to a higher one, where belonging to the upper class means having money, and it is money that buys power. And yet it came about, and I saw this happen in 1967, that they took poverty as their ideal. All the hippy movements and so on have the same staggering significance of a rejection of wealth. It's a very positive sign, a return to the moral ideals which have basically always ruled the world. What had been certain until then, no longer is. We must base our struggle on this new truth. The world of today is full of ideals and I think that we may be entering the period of mankind's greatest fulfilment: what the prophets, the moralists, the various religions have always advocated, has never been put into practice. There is another, very important saying of Huizinga's: the sin of pride was metaphysical, but greed is only physical, material. I think that today we stand on the threshold of a marvellous epoch. I am convinced of it, and so all I am trying to do is to try to bring it into being as easily as possible. I don't know whether we shall succeed or not. You must forgive my idealism.

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It's a little like that of St Francis.

I feel very close to him. Believe me, I spend a lot of my time with people of your age, and I know how much there is about you all that's marvellous. I never in my life felt more emotion than I did at the time of the confrontations in Paris; but then it was all gone within a few days, all that great explosion of extraordinary feeling was lost, became confused, because it gave way to passion. We must stay within the orbit of what's rational, it's the only way to begin again. You must forgive me for ending up with a sermon.

Notes

1. The word used in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no 145, was 'tendresse', which is not quite the same as 'tenerezza' in Italian or 'tenderness' in English.
2. Almost all Rossellini's films with Ingrid Bergman were made in English.
3. *Jeanne au bucher* is an opera by Arthur Honegger based on a book by Paul Claudel. *I carabinieri* is a play by Beniamino Joppolo, which Rossellini told Jean-Luc Godard about, and was taken by the latter as the basis for *Les Carabiniers* (1963).

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Rossellini's Manifesto

signed by Roberto Rossellini, Gianni Amico, Adriano Aprà, Gianvittorio Baldi, Bernardo Bertolucci, Tinto Brass, Vittorio Cottafavi; issued in Rome and translated here from the French version published in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no 171, October 1965, pp 7-8.

It is among the most dramatic features of modern civilisation that the vast improvement in the standard of living, resulting from scientific and technical advances, has brought with it, not a state of happiness and moral well-being, but a disconcerting impression of disturbance and sickness. There is a vague feeling abroad that our civilisation is only temporary, and already inwardly eroded. Agitation, violence, indifference, boredom, anguish, spiritual inertia and passive resignation are all expressed at every level, by individuals and socially. Modern man in the so-called 'developed' countries no longer seems to have an awareness of himself or of the things around him. And the chief testimony to all these developments is modern art.

What are we to conclude from it all?

Should we turn our backs on this civilisation of ours, claiming as it does to be rational and positive, but apparently unable to find any point of equilibrium? — No, definitely not. But we must act to obviate the confusion, the imbalance and disproportion we see growing worse each day. In modern art there is something to be detected which may perhaps provide the key to the present state of derangement: literature, drama, poetry, etc, do not seem to have taken account of what has happened in the world since the giddy race of progress began, due to the great scientific and technical discoveries, in the second half of the 18th century, changing the shape of the world and of society. Artists have, without a shadow of doubt, remained indifferent to machinery, which has carried out the most difficult, complicated jobs with unfailing accuracy and extraordinary speed — and so changed man's destiny. Artists have failed to draw inspiration either from the invention and extension of new sources of artificial energy, or from man himself; man, who after thousands of years of toil and struggle, has finally mastered the forces of nature, driving the time of death further and further back, increasing his own safety and well-being. We challenge anyone to point to five works, in any artistic field, which have taken their inspiration from these conquests.

It is our intention to do what has so far remained undone. We work in the cinema and in television, and we intend to make films and programmes to help man to recognise the actual horizons of his world. We want to show, in an interesting but scientifically correct way, down to the smallest details, everything that art, or the cultural products distributed by the audio-visual media, have so far failed to show — things they have, still worse, ridiculed and abused.

We wish, again, to present man with the guide-lines of his own history, and depict drama, comedy and satire, the struggles, the experiences and the psychology of the people who have made the world what it is today, making it a criterion to fuse together entertainment, information and culture.

The past two hundred years, which have seen the birth and growth of our civilisation as it is today, provide us with a wealth of material and dramatic inspiration.

We are convinced that with this kind of work we can help to develop information media which, with education, will be indispensable to the

process of enlightenment through which man will be able to win back happiness, by giving him an understanding of his own importance, his own position in the history of the world. 111

Translated by Judith White.

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Muller

by Adriano Aprà and Maurizio Ponzi

Viaggio in Italia has been criticised a lot, but you have said very little about it. What do you think of it now?

I have hardly ever talked about it — what is there to say? You can't go around defending yourself, though if you could that would have been the time to do it, because the critics were so aggressive. . . . But you see, this is a job in which you have to take all kinds of risks.

What was the meaning of the finale? Many people thought — wrongly I believe — that it was mystical.

Look, it's difficult to remember these things ten years later — they're all water under the bridge now, and once things are over and done with you have to forget about them. That finale — there was a lot of argument about it, but I thought it was really simple. There were these two great big figures with a lot of little figures around them, all of them smaller still because they were kneeling down. What the finale shows is sudden, total isolation. You could say 'it's not clear' — I remember at the time they said things to me like, 'well there you should have had a long shot showing such and such. . . .' But I didn't want a long shot in it. You see, these things are implicit. Unfortunately it's not as if every act of our lives is based on reason. I think everyone acts under the impulse of the emotions as much as under the impulse of intelligence. There's always an element of chance in life — this is just what gives life its beauty and fascination. There's no point in trying to theorise it all. It struck me that the only way a *rapprochement* could come about was through the couple finding themselves complete strangers to everyone else. You feel a terrible stranger in every way when you find yourself alone in a sea of people of a different height. It's as if you were naked. It's logical that someone who finds himself naked should try to cover himself up.

So is it a false happy ending?

It is a very bitter film basically. The couple take refuge in each other in the same way as people cover themselves when they're seen naked, grabbing a towel, drawing closer to the person with them, and covering themselves any old how. This is the meaning the finale was meant to have.

And does.

Perhaps I was wrong not to make it completely obvious, to show it as a discovery. But that wouldn't suit me. I think it is a fairly normal thing in modern society that many marriages are limited companies under another name. People get married because one of them has a job to do, the other has a number of connections, so the wife acts as a public relations officer while the husband is an economics official, to describe it in terms of actual jobs. There is more to life than that. And the couple in *Viaggio in Italia* are that kind of couple — people who have nothing to say to each other outside of their work, their job, their daily routine. A vacation, more than anything else, is the death of them. Owning a lovely villa in one of the most beautiful places in the world counts for nothing, because they no longer know what to say to each other: if they don't talk about quotations on the stock exchange or making this or that deal, their relationship is finished.

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The film reveals their secret feelings . . .

Yes, but it shows Italy as well, which is also a feeling, and an important one at that — Katherine looks at all the documentary stuff and scarcely sees it. It's a different kind of life, a different ethnic group — there's an ethnographic encounter too. . . .

You know that many people took the miraculous ending as the dramatic centre-piece?

But it's scarcely there — there is a miracle, but there's confusion and hysteria surrounding it. In fact it's also a human sign, a sign of good faith. What do these two characters aspire to be? Banal as they are, they want to be perfectly rational beings. They're not geniuses, but the most 'normal' beings you can imagine. They are rational because their life is based on things they have to believe in at any cost.

The woman is always quoting a so-called poet who describes Italy as a country of death — imagine, Italy a country of death! Death doesn't exist here, because — it's so much a living thing that they put garlands on the heads of dead men. There is a different meaning to things here. To them death has an archaeological meaning, to us it is a living reality. It's a different kind of civilisation.

The ending of Stromboli has also been criticised a lot.

And for the same reasons as *Viaggio in Italia*. A woman who has been through the war, through both collaborationism and the concentration camps, and has been clever enough to find *all* the right answers, comes to a point where she finds herself lost in a maze. What she does is to sit down and cry like a child, and it's the only sane thing left she could do, the only tiny spark of something human and alive. If a child is crying, if he's banged his foot, he

makes just the same noise – ‘Oh mummy’, ‘Oh God’ – it sounds just the same.

Doesn’t the ending of Vanina Vanini depend on the same kind of fear, on not knowing what to do?

Vanina Vanini has a different setting. It’s a different moment in time. There’s more mysticism. There’s a certain element of mysticism in all of us. The most atheistic man on the face of the earth finds some reason for transcending himself, even in his atheism. These things too are a part of man.

In your view, is Karin leaving or going back?

I don’t know. That would be the beginning of another film. The only hope for Karin is to have a human attitude towards something, at least once. The greatest monster has some humanity in him. In *Monsier Verdoux*, when he is about to go to the guillotine, they offer him a drink and he refuses it. But before he is marched off he needs to screw up his courage, so he takes the glass, sips at it and is off: and then he feels the taste of it, turns back and drains the glass – and then away he goes to have his head cut off. It shows an extraordinary human side of him. There is a turning point in every human experience in life – which isn’t the end of the experience or of the man, but a turning point. My finales are turning points. Then it begins again – but as for what it is that begins. I don’t know. I’ll tell that another time, if it has to be told. If things haven’t happened there’s no point in going on and getting involved in another story.

What do you think of the cinema today?

I’m not interested in the cinema as such. You can’t proceed by allusions. So much is now urgent in life that it’s useless just to allude to things. The arguments have to be explicit now. We have to have the courage to admit that in the past hundred years all art has been reduced to complaints. An artist is lesser or greater depending on how much he complains. They call it protest (*denuncia*). The fact is that it’s complaining, because if it was protest it would be carried out differently, more aggressively, and what’s more, if you become aware that something’s wrong, you have to be prepared to break away from it and put it right. But this eternal moaning and protesting about how much is wrong is something quite different. Anyway it’s not true that everything is wrong, some things are and some things aren’t. The fact is that the main reason for things being wrong is that men are incapable of living the lives they have made for themselves. Real alienation, in the strict sense of being alien to something, is when man feels alienated from his own life. Unhappily today life is very complicated, and to understand it you would need to make an enormous effort, and above all get down to studying it. And because there’s

more and more idleness in the world this is never done, and so there comes a point when you are living only on feelings and sentiments, and you moan about it. I agree that there are a lot of people with cause for complaint, but on the other hand there must be many who don't complain. Complaint, as a rather irrational attitude, doesn't seem to me to get you anywhere, when you have extremely concrete things to struggle for. The concrete things in life are pushed aside at every point. We know nothing of them because we don't get down to examining these problems.

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Don't you think that Viaggio in Italia was a film on alienation ante litteram?

Yes, it was about alienation. But that's why I say that I don't even like my own films, because when I began to make that kind of film it was of course in a search for an orientation, but when you realise that everyone has the same orientation, or is engaged in the same search, it becomes an attitude, an attitude of complaint.

But neither Viaggio in Italia nor for example Europa '51 are complaining films. And they were made ten years earlier. . . .

That's just the problem — I feel a great responsibility for it. Everyone else has gone the same way since. How can you justify the attitude of art in general today? Leaving aside the cinema, look at painting, which is so obviously an art. Look at the deformation that has taken place there. It's not just breaking away from formulae, it's not just a revolutionary movement. It was, but it's gradually become a kind of escape, a refusal to look at the world. It's a dramatic change. Now, the world has a right to expect something of intellectuals, and artists in particular. If the artist can't in some sense act as a guide to point the way, if he is unable to take his bearings and say, 'today, at this point in time, these are our horizons', then the function of the artist disappears. For the artist to be an artist only for himself may be very pleasant indeed, but from a social point of view it offers us nothing. It's useless to go and see an artist's work so that you can say, 'Look, how interesting, this man feels so rootless and alienated. . . .' You can go and look at such phenomena if you want: if you are really interested go and visit a mental hospital. You'll find much more interesting and important cases there, things you'd never imagined.

What you're saying is that the artist should have a realistic outlook.

Yes. He should be aware of the world he is living in. I think the artist has a very definite function in this world — it is to clarify things. When culture involved little knowledge, even if it was of an elevated kind — as in Greek thought, classical history and mythology, and the Bible, artists gave of themselves as much as

116 they could, they brought this knowledge to life and made it comprehensible to everyone: it was their civilisation. But tell me, does modern art try to concern itself with everyday things like the motor-car? The movement of art knows no repetitions: this is why I have had to take my distance from that world, why I could only remain a part of it by working in a completely different way. If you make a change it must be a total change. In a period like this there are facts that only the sciences of biology, physiography and demography can supply. Men have taken a billion years to become three billion. In thirty-five years, in the year 2000, they will be six billion, if mankind goes on reproducing at the present rate — these are amazing facts. What does anything else matter? Men must be strong enough to come to terms with this fact. It arises from their conquests in the fields of medicine, food production, science and technology. The result of affluence has been that life expectation has risen from 27 to 66-67 years. Alexander the Great was a little boy who would have been soundly spanked today if he tried to do what he did then. Now the world is inhabited mainly by old people, because life is longer. These are the facts: once you become aware of them, there must be some artistic response, and it may be genuine and capable of making such an impression that everyone will be made more sensitive to these great problems. In a very few years, if these things aren't put right — and however much people complain they aren't being put right — the time will come when hordes of men will come like locusts to eat us because we have more food than they, or we will be going to kill them because they have taken the food out of our mouths. Well, this is not much of a prospect for *homo sapiens*, and for good or evil we belong to the species of *homo sapiens*. We have to find out whether we are 'sapientes' or not: at least we should try to be 'sapientes'.

What do you think of improvisation?

If the ideas are good you can allow yourself the luxury of any improvisation. When you come to make a film and it has to be specially striking, when it needs an air of authenticity which it couldn't have if it was premeditated. Then improvisation comes in, but it must be the improvisation of civilised man, not of the savage.

I think that is what you said about Jean Rouch's La Punition.

Yes.

And was Viaggio in Italia improvised?

We never knew one day what we'd be doing the next. Things came together on the spot — there's a certain logic to things that can't be calculated in advance. You're on the set, you have the scene and the actors, and they dictate the course you have to follow,

they almost give you the characters themselves. But this doesn't mean you stand there and toss a coin to find out which way to film.

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Europa '51 is a typical example of 'character-experience'.

All my films are. I advocated this so much in France, where I have always spent a lot of time; and the young directors, there, who were emerging in the right atmosphere and had had the right kind of education for it, caught on to it at once.

Do these ideas still hold for you?

Yes, but they still belong to the 'complaining' school, and this gives me a horror of them. These feelings crystallised in me in the period of '53-55, the period of *Viaggio in Italia* and *La Paura*, when the word 'denunciation' was being bandied about so much. That was what made me think. What use is 'denunciation'? It's of some use if you have a very definite philosophy and want to carry out a very definite action. If you want to do something useful, you have to be aware of all sides of the problem, and therefore of the positive sides as well as the negative. You have to go back to Jules Verne to find the positive side. The great turning-point of the industrial revolution, a transformation involving so much social injustice, and so many ideas which are now strongly denounced, came about from the moment that man developed science and put it into practice with technical means unthought of before. This was the biggest discovery of all. Man had been a slave; energy had always been supplied by men, with some help from the animals, and then from windmills and watermills: but this was a great advance. Now energy, steam energy and electrical energy, were *invented*. It was a fantastic advance, introducing a completely new dimension into men's lives, and transforming their prospects. Prometheus's discovery of fire, which had begun it all, has been sung by thousands of poets, good and bad, and depicted by thousands of painters and sculptors. But who has tried to describe anything of what has happened this time?

It is an extraordinarily uplifting experience to seize something from nature and make a tool of it. It's out of proportion to complain because of course energy had made it possible to have factories, and factories have brought machines to make things that are quite useless, or of relatively little use; and that man is somehow subjected to these things. . . . It's of course quite right that there should be protests, but what I don't understand is that people have nothing else to say. Knowledge is the most human thing there is, nothing is more human than to know things, and we no longer know anything — I think that's a basic fact of our life today.

Where does your return to history fit into all this?

Why is there nothing but protest today, if not because we have

118 forgotten everything that went before? To put things to rights you have to put history to rights too. *L'età del ferro* shows history in this way.

You show history but in the present tense rather than in a historiographical perspective.

History has been written, in all good faith, in order to educate. Education is both a beautiful and an ugly word. It comes from 'ducere', to lead – in other words to grab someone by the scruff of the neck and drag him off wherever you please. This is how many of our history text books are written. At one time, for example, it was necessary to uphold the monarchy, and everything was done to that end. Propaganda isn't an invention of this century by any means. It's because we can see this today that it's possible to try to re-write some parts of history in a way that's much closer to the truth. Mommsen wrote his histories, which are a storehouse of knowledge, to show that the Germans were the only real Aryans in Europe. One person comes out with an idea which looks original – or even is original – and everyone buzzes round it like bees around a hive. And then it gets hacked about and falsified, and that's how so many mistakes arise. So even to look at or re-examine history is something of the greatest importance. What we should go back to history for is to re-discover man, and man at his humblest at that. What do the exceptional men matter to us? I'm quite unmoved by the myth of the superman. *Viva l'Italia!* is a documentary made after the event, and trying to deduce what had happened: it was made with great precision with regard to the facts, using a diary kept by Bandi, who was close to Garibaldi. He was no poet, but he wrote down everything that happened: you have only to read it and you can see what Garibaldi was like. I didn't make any of it up. Read Bandi. Garibaldi was expecting the arrival of the Bourbon generals to negotiate the surrender of Palermo. They entered his room as he was peeling an orange, and he divided it up and gave a segment to each of them. Someone was there to see it and write it down. You only have to do a little research. All Bandi says about the meeting with Mazzini is what they said to each other outside the door. We don't know what they said when they went inside as no-one wrote it down, but it was not very difficult to re-construct: it was only necessary to read Mazzini's letter to his little friend in England. *Vanina Vanini* is very like *Viva l'Italia!*, with elements of pure Stendhal. That's to say, it has a certain critical content, it's not exactly a straight version of the novel. I borrowed from many other things: *Les promenades dans Rome*, *De l'amour*, *Napoli Roma Firenze*, etc using whatever fitted, and I made the film as a work of historical research. Being a Roman, I could easily understand a character belonging to the period of the rise of romanticism – an intense girl, who has only to give her hand to someone

to feel herself swooning. . . Stendhal's character is so cynical – a Roman noblewoman who believes in absolutely nothing and satisfies specific instincts, so this is where there is a substantial change in the character. With a different actress the character would have been different.

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It is highly significant that one of the many regulations at the Congress of Vienna was a ban on wearing long trousers, because trousers were not just a matter of dress. . . The *sans culottes* had become a revolutionary movement. When men are capable of such meanness it's not something you can ignore, it needs saying. It seems incredible, but these are things humanity is made of. It is the little things that strike one, much more than any theories. You have to say things so that everyone can understand them immediately. But again I should make clear what I mean. It is possible to become popular by going along with what is fashionable, but you should instead try to sow the seeds of ideas which are to become popular.

You once said of Stromboli that Karin is a character 'imprisoned in a geographical situation'.

Her geographical situation is a trap. She finds herself in a maze, not because she chose to enter it but because there comes a moment when the very structure of the world she lives in turns into a maze. I think this is the point which most closely ties in with the needs of the story. It all has a definite logic. If Karin had not ended up on an island, it would have been quite a different kind of story, with a different twist to it.

What can you tell us about Europa '51?

As far as the world is concerned Irene is mad. She is someone who wants to make her life profoundly moral and does everything possible to achieve that, but it isn't what the average person would do. And so she ends up behind bars in a lunatic asylum, with people looking up at her as if she were mad, while she gazes down at them as if they were mad. The unfortunate fact is that what the world lacks today is heroes.

How about India?

It was the discovery of another world, and I've learned a great deal from it. I felt a need to go in search of something completely new, to venture into a world I already had a mental image of. The Indian view of man seems to me to be quite perfect and rational. It's wrong to say that it is a mystical conception of life, and it's wrong to say that it isn't. The truth of the matter is this: in India, thought attempts to achieve complete rationality, and so man is seen as he is, biologically and scientifically. Mysticism is also a part of man. In an emotive sense mysticism is perhaps the highest expression of man. As all expressions of humanity are

120 respected, so too are these. All Indian thought, which seems so mystical, is indeed mystical, but it's also profoundly rational. We ought to remember that the mathematical figure nought was invented in India, and the nought is both the most rational and the most metaphysical thing there is. India has a much more complete view of all human leanings, and attempts to preserve them all. This is what's so fascinating. In a world like ours, where everything is black and white, intermediate shades and colours don't exist: but the world, and still more the men in it, are made of such shades.

And hadn't you discovered this before India?

In my own personal attitude towards things, yes I had. But I didn't go to India to find this out or to get confirmation of it. I went so that I could see a world at the end of one period of history and the beginning of another, perhaps still more dramatic. That's what drew me there, and when I was there, it was this very complete conception of man that struck me most. I felt the need to break out of the restrictions and limitations here. It was there that I understood the need to embark on a new search and gain a wider consciousness: to be in the fullest sense you have to become conscious, you need to study. And I began to do so systematically.

What do you think of the 'nouvelle vague'?

I haven't seen much of it. For a time I was very close to these young people, and we were very friendly, and then they went their own way. Basically, if I did make any contribution to what they have done it was through stressing again and again that above all they should not regard the cinema as something mystical. The cinema is a means of expression like any other. You should approach it as simply as you pick up a pen to write with. What matters is knowing what you are going to write – everyone should write what he enjoys writing. Writing to please someone else would only be insincerity. The absolute freedom these people have with the camera arises from this demystifying of the process of making films.

What have you to say about your experience in the theatre?

You know what it is to have a chance at something? Well, this is a chance I've happily seized with both hands. Every new experience counts – they're invigorating. In the theatre there's no work of creation, it's all a matter of polishing up and putting in order, trying to make the script come over clearly.

What relationship do you have with the actors?

It's a question of the individual personality. George Sanders would cry all the way through the film. He moaned terribly and I used to say to him, 'What are you getting so depressed about, at the

worst you'll have made one more bad film – nothing worse than that can happen. I don't see anything to cry about in that, there's no cause for despair. We've all made good films and bad films. So we'll make another bad one. What can you do? There's no need to tear your hair out or kill yourself over it.' No, to be frank, you have to make them work for you. You can use anything, even an actor's temper. You see something, in a moment of temper, a certain expression or attitude, that you can use, and so of course you use it. I don't in the least believe in collective art. I can't believe in it. I don't claim to be an artist but I've always hoped that my work is artistically acceptable. It's no good descending to compromises: you have to get somewhere at any cost, at the cost of quarrels, fights, bad moods, insults and coaxing, anything you think will work.

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Why did you choose Sanders?

Don't you think he was obvious for the part? It was his bad moods rather than his own personality that suited the character in the film.

How did you come to film the Indian material for TV?

They were making a documentary and I shot the material for the documentary.

Do you think the optics are different in cinema and TV?

I don't think there are very big differences. The aim is different, that's all. If you're making a documentary, you're making a documentary; if you want to make a film you make a film. Whether you're doing it for television or for the big screen is of secondary importance. . . .

So you don't think that the spectator is psychologically conditioned by the means of transmission?

Of course not. What conditions him is who it's made by. If it's made by a fraud going round doing scandalously false things, that does affect him. If *India* was a documentary, it was thought up with the intention of making a psychological discovery, going deep into things and not just looking at the surface. When you make a straight documentary it's more journalistic in tone, but there is a purpose to that too. A documentary is for giving information, a film is more exploratory, and that's the real difference.

*How did it come about that you made *L'età del ferro*?*

It didn't start out as such. It started from the need to make a different kind of film. I have said this before.¹ There came a time when I felt really useless. I think this is what's wrong with all modern art. It's all moans and protests, but never takes account

122 of what the real problems are. It seems obvious to me that these protests are made without knowledge of the world. The truth is that we protest because we are confronted with a world whose structure we haven't grasped, and that seems to me to be the basic problem. There's a point at which it's necessary to have a clear picture, a definite horizon. This is the only way to get one's bearings and see where we stand in time and space. No figure in geometry can be drawn, and so no space can be enclosed, without some points of reference. This is why I have gradually begun to work and study to try to understand how things are. Everyone knows that cars exist, but there are reasons for them apart from their being vehicles you buy on HP and then drive along a road. In my investigations I've begun to find out things which are not only amusing and interesting but which I think can be a stimulus to the artist. What I have been trying to do is to pass on to others an awareness of this cultural need, of the experience of learning and teaching, without detracting from the content. My project has been to research new things and new sources. When you become aware of these things everything develops in a different way. Art has basically always had the aim of understanding as well as expressing things. But what does the art of today learn or teach? It is the expression of a certain malaise, of a state of unhappiness and incomprehension but no more. I don't think that real human problems are just problems of the impossibility of communicating or anything so subtle — such things belong to psychiatry rather than to man, to be frank they are extreme cases viewed by dilettantes. Man has discovered artificial energy — electricity, steam, thermodynamics etc. It's such a great gain that today men travel through space and from continent to continent in vehicles driven by this energy, catch aeroplanes, light their homes at the flick of a switch, use electric irons — it's an overwhelming victory of man over nature. But tell me who has been moved by it, what artists have dwelt on this amazing fact, which is at least equal to the discovery of fire, in fact greater. We have been indifferent, we have even begun to complain about it. Now if we don't really develop our awareness of it, how can we have a feeling of the world we live in, the riches this world can have. Above all you have to take the reins of this civilisation and be able to drive it towards ends that have to be thought out quite clearly and precisely. But instead, strangely enough, as science and technology advance — and I mean science and technology in the highest sense, the sense of knowledge which is human in its very fibre — art abandons itself to daydreams in the most irrational way imaginable. You build a rational world and the whole of art takes off into fantasy, fantasy which is always inward-looking because then it becomes a protest, placing a restraint on fantasy itself. Why did I choose the Iron Age? — our historical epoch is known as the Iron Age. It was one of the first things to be dealt with. If you have to start writing

an alphabet, you must first work out what are the vowels. If you like, *L'età del ferro* is there to establish the vowels, and I shall go on from there. These projects must be developed with the utmost rigour of method, if they are to have their proper educative effect. I have drawn up something of a plan, which closely follows my own study programme. As this programme was useful to me in putting my ideas in order, it may be of use to others. This is what my system of pedagogy amounts to. I don't put myself on the outside or go and think about things in an abstract way. I just recount the experiences I have had.

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It is then a plan which has been tested and corrected against reality.

Yes. Another serious mistake of our times is to try and summarise everything: things can't be summarised. It's possible to find a clear and comprehensible way of saying things that might be obscure, but you don't understand anything through summaries and digests. It's a real attempt to impart knowledge as that is understood in the modern world. But it is based on a false view of consciousness, examining things at a distance and fitting them into theories which remain no more than theories and bear no relation to historical reality. It's a strange way of expressing a theory, a way which commercialises what should be a very different kind of endeavour. One of man's great struggles has been to subjugate man — there have been endless attempts, with recourse to everything from grace to eloquence, rhetoric and history, to subjugate man to man. Every effort has been made to make this enslavement so far as possible a voluntary act, and this was the least difficult part of it. The best way to keep a slave is when he has voluntarily become a slave, in the belief that he is performing a duty. It's what in modern terms would be called conditioning. Today this has been rationalised, it has become scientific.

In this state of things the very aim of art ought to be to free men from their conditioning.

This should of course be the great mission of art. But art has also always had the opposite objective. Virgil, you know, was an 'agitprop' man for the Roman Empire. This aim is clear in all Virgil's work — of course he believed in it, but it's all done to extol a definite world. It's quite clear to me that this was the case. And at the same time he was a very great poet. He worked in absolute good faith, he admired his civilisation and designed all his work to further it. Today, when we can perhaps see things in more scientific terms, and the spirit of democracy has made some advance, much more choice is needed, choice of a genuine kind, with the possibility of choosing true knowledge. But instead choices are always made on the basis of slogans or stereotypes.

124 *You yourself tend towards rationality, though not in a schematic way.*

What's schematic is to limit the realm of knowledge to rationality. Arithmetic is highly rational but it's not rational as compared to mathematics, if you understand me. It's all a question of the level of development of thought.

The striking thing about L'età del ferro is the way the sequences you have made alternate with existing film or newsreel.

You have to use everything that can make a point firmly and with precision. If you are making a bridge you need so many supports. There'll be one on the bank, one in mid-stream, but there's sand and mud there so you put it a bit further across the stream but resting on rock, and then you come to the far bank. So you can't make supports, the supports for the span of thought and knowledge, in a completely pedantic way. I always run away from preconceived ideas. I don't fix a style in advance. You have to use everything that will help to carry out your aim. So I jump from film taken from the archives to re-constructed scenes.

What criterion did you use for choosing the extra film?

I have a lot of film that's exactly right for editing up.

Film you've made yourself?

A detail is enough for a particular kind of montage. If I haven't got it, I just have to do the montage with pieces made for something else. I use them as I want, do the montage leaving some parts blank, and then go and shoot the little bits I need to put the thing together as I want.

But why did you use existing film and not make new?

Look, I did very little. My son Renzo did it all, he's the director – I only thought the idea up. . . .

It was all found in newsreel film, he used newsreel for the things he needed at that point of the story. Again, I advised him not to look at things with preconceived ideas. You should see the films from which he took the frames he used – they were quite different.

What does the fifth episode mean to you?

The fifth episode is an attempt to end with a poetic comment on this civilisation of ours, made as it is of iron and steel and machinery. There's a lot of our own film in it but a lot of material from the archives too. There's documentation of every kind in existence. If there's material you can use by way of illustration, why not use it?

What's the relation of this kind of montage to what you talked about in your interview with Bazin?

It's not montage in that sense. There are some things I need to have which it would take months and months of work to make – I can find the same thing on the market, so I take it and use it in my own way – by putting my own ideas into it, not in words but in pictures.

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Don't you think that even before montage the pictures have a meaning that montage can't completely destroy?

They don't. You have to give them it. The pictures in themselves are nothing more than shadows.

For example, what about the shots of that strange flying machine in the second episode?

All right, you still have the curious appearance of the machine. But if you take a detail away in touching up the film, the significance of the picture changes, doesn't it?

But it can't take on an opposite meaning to what the picture represents.

Of course it can. You don't do this just by selection, but by working on it. Anything you look at is reality for one person but not for another. If I instinctively see a certain reality, without working it out in great detail I place the camera at a certain angle, and film reality in my own way – you see? But if instead I'm using existing film, it's as if I had the picture before it was put on film: I have to re-work it as with any real object.

Often, even in L'età del ferro, you have been reproached with being too slapdash.

If you make a film in a very finished way, it may have a certain intellectualistic value, but that's all. What I am trying to do is to search for truth, to get as near to truth as possible. And truth itself is often slipshod and out of focus.

In the fourth episode, why do you have an 'uncommitted' hero?

It's a true story, I haven't embroidered it very much. The main character is a Piombino worker. The story is very significant for me. The war takes away Montagnani's living. Like everyone else at that time, he's looking for work. He goes with the rest. It's no longer just a question of the factory you work in, and all the exploitation that involves. The factory regains its importance as a source of employment, fulfilling the dreams of centuries: in that part of Italy they've worked iron for 3,000 years.

The fifth episode has been compared to some futuristic experiments. What do you think?

Why, because of a few parallels? The similarity is only technical. The voice off-screen is only a commentary, expressing the need to

126 look at things in a different way. I want to arouse interest in certain ideas. The synonyms, for example, were used not just to explain the action but to express thinking about it.

You seem very involved in the fifth episode, unlike for example in the first two, where you take your distance.

The standpoint is different. What belongs to history has become simple, manageable. But we aren't masters of the world in which we live, you can see that every day. We must make ourselves masters of it. The idea of progress hasn't really spread very far: the 'denunciators', for example, have a retrogressive position.

The pictures in the fifth episode, anyway, are never grand or celebrative, they simply analyse the phenomenon.

The last shot has been taken as meaning that you are inviting us to a general reconciliation.

The last shot only shows men who are able to be in each other's company. It's a fact you can test out against reality. They're coming home from work, and each of them goes off to his own house, they don't exactly break into song. This is how things are.

What's the meaning of the refrigerators which are shown at such length?

It used to be the case that to show something grandiose you would show a cathedral, not a refrigerator. It's a statement of fact, I wouldn't generalise about it. It's true there is something absurd about the refrigerator: it's a luxury, it's superfluous, but it's also of practical importance. You have to be able to look at things without preconceived ideas to know what's right and what isn't. You have to be able to state things. This is exactly what I've tried to do in the fifth episode, bringing together a lot that can perhaps point to a clearer way forward.

Notes

1. Cf 'Conversazione sulla cultura e sul cinema', *Filmcritica* no 131, p 131 seq.

Reprinted from *Filmcritica* no 156-157, April-May 1965, pp 218-234.
Translated by Judith White.

1936 *Daphne*, director (short)

1938 *Luciano Serra, pilota*, written by Rossellini and Goffredo Alessandrini

1939 *Fantasia sottomarina*, director (short)
Il tacchino prepotente, director (short)
La vispa Teresa, director (short)

1941 *Il ruscello di Ripasottile*, director (short)
La nave bianca, director; written by Rossellini and Francesco De Robertis

1942 *Un pilota ritorna*, director; written by Rossellini and others
I tre aquilotti; Rossellini is said to have collaborated on this film

1943 *L'uomo dalla croce*, director; written by Rossellini and others
L'invasore, directed by Nino Giannini; written by Gherardo Gherardi, Nino Giannini, and Rossellini; supervised by Rossellini
Desiderio, director; written by Rossellini and others

1945 *Roma, città aperta*, director; written by Rossellini and others

1946 *Paisà*, director; written by Federico Fellini and Rossellini

1947 *Germania, anno zero*, director; written by Rossellini with others from his own story

1948 *L'amore*, director; I (completed 1947) *Una voce umana*, written by Rossellini from the play *La voix humaine* by Jean Cocteau
II *Il miracolo*, written by Rossellini and Tullio Pinelli from a story by Federico Fellini
La macchina ammazzacattivi, director; written by Rossellini and others from a story

1949 *Stromboli, terra di Dio*, director; written by Rossellini and others

1950 *Francesco, giullare di Dio*, director; written by Rossellini and others from *I fioretti di San Francesco*

1952 *L'invidia* (fifth episode of *I sette Peccati capitali*), director; written by Rossellini and others from a story by Rossellini from *La Chatte* by Collette
Medico condotto, directed by Giuliano Biagetti; written by Rossellini and Antonio Pietrangeli; supervised by Rossellini
Europa '51, director; written by Rossellini and others from his own story

1953 *Dov'è la libertà*, director; written from a story by Rossellini
Viaggio in Italia, director; written by Rossellini and others
Ingrid Bergman (third episode of *Siamo donne*), director
Directed Giuseppe Verdi's opera *Othello* at Teatro San Carlo (Naples)
Directed *Jeanne au bucher*, play by Paul Claudel

1954 *Napoli '43* (fourth episode of *Amori di mezzo secolo*), director; written by Rossellini
Giovanna d'Arco al rogo, director; written by Rossellini
Die angst - La paura, director
Supervised *Orient Express*, directed by Carlo Ludovico Bragaglia
Directed *La Figlia di Jono*, play by Gabriele D'Annunzio

1958 *L'India vista da Rossellini*, director and producer (documentary for RAI)
Interviewed by Etienne Lalou in *J'ai fait un beau voyage*
India, director; written by Rossellini and others from his own story

1959 *Il generale della Rovere*, director; written by Rossellini and others

1960 *Era notte a Roma*, director; written by Rossellini and others
Viva l'Italia, director; written by Rossellini and others

128 1961 *Vanina Vanini*, director; written by Rossellini and others
Torino nei centi-anni, director
Supervised by Rossellini, *Benito Mussolini*, directed by Pasquale Prunas
Directed *Un sguardo dal ponte*, an adaptation of Arthur Miller by Gerardo Guerrieri

1962 *Anima Nera*, director; written by Rossellini
Illibatezza (episode in *Rogopag*), director; written by Rossellini
Directed *I Carabinieri*, a play by Beniamino Joppolo

1964 *L'età del ferro*, directed by Renzo Rossellini jr; written and supervised by Rossellini

1966 *La prise de pouvoir par Louis XIV*, director

1967 *Idea di un'isola*, director (documentary)
La lotta dell'uomo per la sua sopravvivenza, directed by Renzo Rossellini jr; written and supervised by Rossellini

1968 *Atti degli apostoli*, director with Renzo Rossellini jr; written by Rossellini and others

1970 *Socrate*, director; written by Rossellini and others

1971 *Blaise Pascal*, director; written by Rossellini and others

1972 *Agostini di ippona*, director; written by Rossellini and others

1972 *L'età dei Medici: Cosimo de Medici e Leon Battista Alberti*, director; written by Rossellini and others



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